



DelishPlan

SLOW COOKER COOKBOOK

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SLOW COOKING

+ *49* MOUTH-WATERING RECIPES



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for HAN

INTRODUCTION

I was introduced to a slow cooker three and a half years ago when I moved to the States from China in 2013. Recently, I ordered a new slow cooker on Amazon and sent it to my cousin who lives in Ohio.

When she received the gift, she took a photo and sent it to me as a confirmation. In that photo, I noticed something very familiar. It says "Made in China" on the package.

It's funny that I'd never come across a slow cooker when I was in China. Neither had my cousin.

I remember the first time I tried a slow cooker beef roast recipe. The only effort I had to make was to season the beef. Then, I put the beef in the slow cooker, followed by some vegetables. Turned it on and waited for eight hours according to the recipe instructions.

When I opened the lid, I couldn't believe that I handled a four-pound beef and I handled it well. I thought it was magic! Ever since then, I have been using my slow cooker extensively, to the point that one is not enough - I have two of them!

Over the past three years, I learned many cooking tricks along the way, such as how to adapt an oven or stovetop recipe into a slow cooker recipe, how to keep vegetables from disintegrating after long hours of slow cooking, how to control the cooking time when I am away, etc. You will find everything I've

learned about cooking with a slow cooker in the first part of this book, which will help you master your slow cooker.

The other purpose of this book is to introduce creative slow cooker dish ideas to you. If you only associate soups or stews with your slow cooker and store it away when winter has passed, you are totally missing out.

I hope after reading this book and trying some of the recipes, you will change your mind and really put your slow cooker to work because it can make a lot more delicious things you've never thought about before.

There are 49 slow cooker recipes including roasts, pasta, pizzas, stuffed peppers, and sweets in Part Two of the book. My favorites are slow cooker pizza recipes; there are three of them in this book! Use them as a reference, you'll be able to come up with your own pizza ideas and cook them in the slow cooker.

Many recipes in this book are gluten free or include adaptations to make them so. There is also an entire chapter dedicated to vegetarians, so make sure to check out Chapter Fifteen if you don't eat meat.

I would really encourage you to flip to the next page now, but I know you are probably thinking who I am and why I wrote this book.

I am a self-taught home chef who shares her recipes and cooking tips at DelishPlan.com. My work has been seen on The Huffington Post, Elite Daily, The Kitchn, SheKnows, RedBook Magazine and numerous others.

I don't mean to brag. I just wanted you to know that the information in this book is distilled from years of extensive cooking and learning. It's purely from the bottom of my heart. And if you would like to know more about me and my stories, I've covered it all in Part Three of the book.





Part One

SLOW COOKER COOKING TIPS

My husband and I have lived in many places. In other words, we moved quite a bit during the past few years.

Whenever we move, I always make sure to take my favorite kitchen appliances. Sometimes, I have to leave things behind.

Late March 2016, we moved from Florida to Texas.

When packing for that move, between two slow cookers with a total value of \$50 and a 300-dollar KitchenAid stand mixer, I quickly and firmly decided to take the former and leave the KitchenAid to my brother-in-law who lives in Florida.

I simply don't know what to do without my slow cookers.

Here's why.

We all have busy lives. After juggling work and household responsibilities,

there is very little time left to spend with family or even to ourselves every day. To me, slow cooking frees up my time—I'm not standing in the kitchen and taking care of the food, so sometimes it's a lifesaver. The purpose of using a slow cooker is to be completely hands-off from the actual cooking so that we can do something else.

All the slow cooker tips and tricks you'll learn in this chapter are based on my own cooking experience. You'll find everything you need to know about how to use a slow cooker effectively, not only just for making comfort food in the winter, but for your summer cooking, as well. The slow cooker is a great tool to use year round. The more you use it, the less hassle you have with cooking.

Chapter One

PROS AND CONS OF COOKING WITH A SLOW COOKER

Slow cooker aficionados like us know most of the benefits of using a slow cooker. But if your experience with a slow cooker so far is limited, you might not be up-to-date on all the advantages that this kitchen appliance can offer. To be fair, I am listing the cons, too, because nothing is perfect.





*CON: Cooking with a slow cooker is...slow.
There's no fast food option with a slow cooker.*



PRO: Your home will be filled with the enticing smell of a home cooked meal all day long. If you have a picky eater in the house, a slow cooker will help awaken his appetite!

CON: If you're cooking for just one, you might need to get a second, smaller slow cooker.



PRO: You can make an entire dinner for a large family in one round of slow cooking. Some large slow cookers are sold with a free, bonus mini slow cooker for smaller servings or fondue.

CON: A slow cooker will never produce a mouth-watering T-bone steak.



PRO: Your grill will never produce a juicy roast, and with a slow cooker you can get amazing taste out of inexpensive cuts of meat that you could never get away with on a grill.

CON: Home chefs who love to stand in the kitchen cooking all day will be disappointed with the simplicity of making meals in a slow cooker.



PRO: Busy people who love homemade meals will appreciate the simplicity of making meals in a slow cooker.

CON: You might be chopping garlic and onions at breakfast time if you want to come home from work to a finished slow cooker meal.



PRO: You could do your whole week's prep work on one day and have the rest of the week off from cooking. Studies show that you get more done in less time when you complete chores (like food prep) in large blocks of time instead of doing them sporadically throughout the week.

CON: Slow cookers can be big and a little unwieldy.



PRO: Many slow cookers are made in attractive designs and colors that complement modern kitchen décor, so you can leave them on your counter instead of in a hard-to-reach cupboard. In fact, many decorators recommend **keeping colorful appliances on display to add pops of color in the kitchen.**





CON: Slow cookers can take up a lot of counter space.



PRO: Your oven takes up even more space, but you'll probably use your slow cooker more often than the oven. Plus, according to the Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings, your oven costs about 16 cents to run for one hour, while a slow cooker costs only 6 cents to run for seven hours.

CON: You can't cook everything in a slow cooker.



PRO: A slow cooker is just about the only way to cook without being in the kitchen or even in the house. Basically, you can't beat that! By the way, did you know that the average American spends over \$1,000 a year on takeout food? That's the kind of money you could save by using a slow cooker to prepare meals while you're at work or attending your kids' sports games.

There are so many more pros than cons to using a slow cooker that this list isn't really fair. Slow cooking is the best way to get hot, homemade meals on the table when you want them. So what are the basic principles about a slow cooker meal?

Chapter Two

SLOW COOKER MEAL TIPS

Making meals with a slow cooker is one of the easiest ways to provide daily nourishment for you and your family. Simple as it is, there are several tips that will make the process even better, producing the best results possible. Here are some expert slow cooker meal tips that you may want to keep in mind.

I. START WITH FRESH INGREDIENTS.

You can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear, as they say. Whatever meal you're making, use the freshest ingredients that you can. Just because you're tossing them into a slow cooker and they're disappearing under the lid doesn't mean you should use an ingredient that wouldn't be fit to appear all by itself on a dinner plate.

Long before ingredients get to a dangerously spoiled stage, they lose their flavor and nutrients. Chemically, food changes as it ages. Just as a brown banana has a lot more sugar than a green or barely ripe banana, your vegetables' taste and nutritional values are altered the longer they sit in your fridge or pantry. Since your goal with slow cooking is health as well as convenience, begin with the freshest ingredients possible.

2. CHOOSE BROTH, FILTERED WATER OR WATER, IN THAT ORDER.

Almost every slow cooker recipe calls for a liquid. The liquid you use is just as important an ingredient as the other items in the recipe.

Vegetable or meat broth should be your first choice because it will impart the most flavor to your dish. (Also, since you have a slow cooker, there's little excuse not to have some homemade broth on hand, right?).

If you don't have broth, your second choice should be filtered water. Tap water quality varies considerably depending on the region of the country you live in. And, as you've no doubt heard in





the news, tap water impurities in content and taste can occur with little warning.

There are lots of options for water filters, depending on your preference and budget, but the least expensive is the pitcher filter that you can keep on hand in your refrigerator.

3. KEEP CURIOSITY AT BAY.

As you come to rely on and enjoy the convenience of slow cooking, you'll start to use your slow cooker on weekends and days off, not just on the days you have to work. Besides, after doing your weekly shopping and prep work, isn't it nice to sit down to a fully cooked meal? You know it is!

The problem with this comfy scenario is the irresistible aroma of your slow cooker meal as it cooks.

Since you and any little tykes are at home and experiencing that scent-sational atmosphere, it's extremely hard to resist the urge to keep lifting the lid to inhale all that goodness.

Nothing fills the home with the bouquet of delicious delights quite like a slow cooker. But you must keep your curiosity at bay. Every time you lift the lid, heat and flavor molecules escape from the dish. Only raise the lid when the recipe calls for it.

4. DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT.

Slow cookers are very forgiving. (Trust me, I know.) If you think you have an idea for a twist on an old stand-by, don't

be shy about trying it out.

Slow cookers are fantastic platforms for trying out new spices that you've always wanted to test.

Or maybe you have a family recipe, and you'd like to convert it into a slow cooker recipe. Use the tips I'll give you in the next chapter about adapting a regular recipe into a slow cooker recipe. Then open up your spice cabinet and see what other goodies you have in there that might enhance the dish. There's never been an easier way to play with exotic spices and unusual ingredients. Pretty soon you'll be inventing new slow cooker recipes that will become family favorites.


5. DON'T CONFUSE WARMING WITH STORING.

Even the most basic slow cookers have a setting for warming. This is to keep food warm after it's finished cooking until you serve it.

You shouldn't, however, leave the food in the slow cooker on the warming setting indefinitely. This will result in the food drying out and going past its "done" point.

You should also never leave your dish in the slow cooker sitting on the counter overnight unless you're cooking something for the next day.

The dark, moist and warm conditions can lead to unhealthy bacterial growth. If you want, when you've finished with mealtime, just remove the entire



ceramic dish and store it in the fridge with the lid on, assuming you can make room for it. The next day, take it out of the fridge, allow the ceramic dish and lid to come to room temperature, and reheat it right in your slow cooker.

Note: Reheat food on the lowest setting or the warming setting for best results. You might need to add a little extra liquid underneath your beef roast or chicken.

Chapter Three

THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO ADAPTING A RECIPE TO A SLOW COOKER

Cooking a conventional meal usually requires us home chefs to be physically in the kitchen, babysitting what's on the stove until the food is done. Even if it's a baking dish, you don't feel comfortable just stepping away to walk your dog, run errands, or go to your yoga class. What if something happens, and you can't get home fast enough to turn off the oven?

The good news is that you will be able to do all that and even go to work for the day with a slow cooker. We all love that set-and-forget convenience.

The questions are: How do you identify what types of recipes can be adapted? How can you successfully adapt a recipe to a slow cooker? Read on.

Before I dive into the techniques of adapting a recipe, let's get familiar with the fundamentals first.

WHAT KINDS OF RECIPES ARE ADAPTABLE?

Generally speaking, if you are looking at recipes for soups, stews, roasts, braises and ribs, most likely you will be able to turn them into slow cooker recipes.

WHAT KINDS OF MEAT SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

OK, say you are ready to make a conventional recipe into a slow cooker recipe. The kind of meat you choose really matters to your success. In general, tougher and cheaper cuts of meat work best. So brisket, roast, chunks, pork butt, pork shoulder, and chicken with bones in will do better in a slow cooker.

What it boils down to is that you want to choose the meats with fat for the slow cooker. The excess fat melts away after long hours of cooking, resulting in lean, juicy, and flavorful meat. Where does all the fat go? It floats on the surface of your food, and you can easily remove it with a big spoon.

Now that you are able to tell if a conventional recipe could do well in your slow cooker and which cuts of meat you should choose, let's move on to exactly how to adapt your recipes.

I. REDUCE COOKING LIQUID BY 40-50%.

Unlike during baking or roasting, the cooking liquid in a slow cooker doesn't evaporate, because the tight seal on the slow cooker's lid locks the juice in



and creates steam. In fact, you will get excess liquid from the food itself during the slow cooking process.

For example, if a conventional recipe calls for one cup beef broth, you might want to just add 1/2 cup broth in your slow cooker.

2. ADD SEAFOOD, PASTA, RICE, AND QUICK-COOKING VEGETABLES 15-30 MINUTES BEFORE THE END OF COOKING.

Quick-cooking ingredients like shrimp, fish, tofu, peas, corn, and greens like spinach and kale should be added to the slow cooker at the end of cooking. The same with pasta and rice. Turn the heat to high and reduce the cooking liquid, allowing the sauce to thicken. In this book, my Orzo Jambalaya and Root-vegetable Tikka Masala are good examples.

3. BE AWARE OF ONIONS, GARLIC AND ALCOHOL.

Due to the tight seal, the slow cooker will promote the accumulation of liquid and strong aroma from garlic and onion. And alcohol doesn't evaporate in a slow cooker. You want to cut 50% of what the original recipes calls for.

4. BROWN THE MEAT IF YOU HAVE TIME.

I understand that the reason you are using a slow cooker is to minimize hassle and effort. Honestly, the recipes are not going to turn out horribly if you don't brown your meat beforehand. But

if you can, I suggest you brown the meat before putting it into the slow cooker, because it helps lock in the flavor.

5. BROIL THE MEAT AFTER SLOW COOKING TO GET A CRISPY SKIN.

Because there's a very little air circulation going on in a slow cooker, your meat will likely be tender and falling off the bones.

However, it's nearly impossible to get a crispy skin like what ovens can do for us. I discovered that broiling the meat after cooking can easily solve this problem.

Now, let's pause right here and take a look at an example.

I made these pork ribs in the oven, which took nearly two hours. Halfway through baking, I took them out and flipped them so that they could cook evenly on both sides. I also added more water to the baking dish after flipping them to prevent the ribs from drying out. The result was amazing!

The next time, I tried the exact same recipe in a slow cooker, except I didn't add any water. Because the ribs were marinated overnight, I didn't brown them on the stovetop. Instead, I placed the marinated ribs directly in the slow cooker and set it on low.

After eight hours, they turned out fork tender and had the same flavor as the oven-roasted ones. There was only one downside, which was the slow-cooked ribs didn't have the crusty skin compared to the oven-roasted ones.



Pork Ribs - Oven Version



Pork Ribs - Slow Cooker Version

Stove/Oven Cook Time	Slow Cooker (Low)	Slow Cooker (High)
15 to 30 minutes	4 to 6 hours	1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours
35 to 45 minutes	6 to 10 hours	3 to 4 hours
50 minutes to 3 hours	8 to 12 hours	4 to 6 hours

That made me wonder, how could we fix that?

I found that broiling the cooked meat for ten minutes or so not only melts the excess fat but also gives the meat a nice, golden, crispy skin. This is how I make the Carnitas for tacos.

6. EXTEND THE COOKING TIME.

Any conventional recipes will take longer to cook in a slow cooker. Here's chart of cooe conversions for your reference.

Resource: Food52'

7. DON'T GIVE BACTERIA A CHANCE TO GROW!

Cooks Illustrated says that no bacteria can grow when the temperature is above 140F. That said, a finished slow cooker meal is safe to eat for up to two hours after the machine is turned off. If you keep it on the warm setting, the food can keep for even longer.

This brings up another common question that people ask me frequently: "If I am at work or away from home, how can I turn off my slow cooker on time without overcooking my food?" Luckily, I have the perfect solution for you.



Chapter Four

CONTROL YOUR SLOW COOKER WHEN YOU ARE AWAY

Most slow cooker recipes have two cooking time options. One is cooking on low. The other one is cooking on high.

You've learned how to use a slow cooker to make a conventional recipe by using a handy time conversion rule: 1 hour of baking at 350°F is equivalent to 6 to 8 hours of cooking in a slow cooker on the low setting, or 4 to 6 hours on high.

Take my Hearty Beef Stew recipe, for example. You can cook it on high for 4-5 hours or on low for 8-10 hours. See, the cooking time on the low setting is basically twice as long as the cooking time on the high setting. Very easy math.

I prefer to use the low setting of our slow cookers because 1) I wanted to slow down the cooking to build flavor and 2) this can give you more walk-away time. You can just leave for work for an entire day without worrying about cooking.

But sometimes life doesn't quite go as planned...

Maybe something comes up at your 9-to-5 to make you stay late. Maybe there's an accident on the highway as you're driving home, or maybe your significant other has a last-minute event to go to, and you have to pick up the kids... For whatever reason, you

come home two hours later than you'd expected.

Assuming you have a regular manual slow cooker like mine, you'll come home to a dinner that is way ready—in fact, it'll be totally overcooked.

My solution is to ask someone in the family to turn off the slow cooker, but that only works if you have someone to rely on and if you remember to ask them!

Yes, you can buy another slow cooker with fancy, programmable functions that lets you set the cooking times. I looked, and those smart slow cookers are priced at anywhere between \$50 to \$300+, whereas a decent manual one is around \$25 to \$30 on Amazon. The costlier models are prone to breaking because of the complicated electronics.

Is there another way to give you more control without spending too much of your hard-earned money? So glad you asked.

The answer is YES! Instead of purchasing a brand-new, high-tech machine, you can just simply add a programmable timer to your current slow cooker and enjoy the same fancy results. This allows you to automatically switch your slow cooker ON and OFF

based on the times that you set. Just set the time on the timer and plug it into an electrical outlet. Make sure that your slow cooker is switched on—turn it on low if you want to cook your food on low setting—then plug the slow cooker into the timer. The timer will then turn on your slow cooker when you want it to start by sending electricity through to the slow cooker, and turn off your slow cooker by cutting the flow of electricity after the timer goes off.

It's a very cost-effective way to get full control of your slow cooker when you are away. This is one of the timers that I use:

24 Hours Programmable Timer Controller

It costs \$10 on Amazon (<http://amzn.to/23JQZft>) and can be used for other things, as well, like turning lights on and off when you're away on vacation.



Chapter Five

HOW TO KEEP VEGETABLES FROM DISINTEGRATING AFTER LONG HOURS OF SLOW COOKING

Imagine you're preparing a pot roast with onions, potatoes, and carrots in your slow cooker. You find one zucchini in your fridge, so you decide to cut it up and throw it into the pot, as well. You pour the prepared sauce over all the ingredients, cover, and set on low.

You don't want to leave for work right away because you want to make sure that the slow cooker is working properly. You stand in front of it, looking through the lid at all the fresh ingredients and thinking how great dinner will be. Then you carefully touch the outside of the slow cooker with your fingers. It's getting hot. It's working. You take off to work.

Nine hours later, you come back home from work. Your entire house smells like heaven. You can't wait to dish out the pot roast from the slow cooker and enjoy the healthful, delicious dinner you made yourself. The meat is perfectly tender and rich in flavor; the onions are completely soaked in the sauce; all the other vegetables are extremely soft.

Everything tastes wonderful, but there's one problem—the vegetables have totally disintegrated after nine hours of slow cooking.

Your pot roast meal is still good, but not great. You wonder if you should make some extra effort to cook the vegetables separately next time.

No, the entire goal of using a slow cooker is to release you from the hassle of everyday cooking, to save you time, and to eat a more healthful diet.

What if I told you that there's a way to keep the vegetables intact after long hours of simmering in the slow cooker?

MAKE A FOIL PACKET!

American's Test Kitchen discovered that the best way to keep vegetables from disintegrating after nine or more hours in the slow cooker is to wrap them in a foil packet. Keeping the vegetables out of the pot roast liquid during cooking slows down their cooking time and keeps their flavors distinct.

I tried it. The vegetables are perfectly cooked and intact this way. Opening the packet and pouring the tender vegetables and their juices back into the pot roast at the end of cooking results in a fantastic meal.

HERE IS A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO SHOW YOU HOW TO DO IT.



Step #1: Toss the vegetables with olive oil, salt and pepper.



Step #2: Prepare a large piece of foil. Place the seasoned vegetables on one side of it.



Step #3: Fold the foil over, shaping it into a packet that will fit into your slow cooker.



Step #4: Crimp to seal the edges.



Step #5: Place the foil packet directly on top of the pot roast, pressing gently as needed to make it fit inside the slow cooker.



Step #6: After cooking, carefully take out the foil packet and place on a plate. Remove as much fat as possible from the surface of the pot roast by using a large spoon. Open the foil packet. Be careful with the steam. Pour perfectly cooked vegetables back into the slow cooker with juices. Give it a gentle stir, making sure the vegetables are dipped into the meat liquid.

THE RESULT? A NUTRITIOUS SLOW COOKER MEAL.

I think this is by far the best way to keep vegetables from disintegrating after long hours of slow cooking. This tip also works great for slow cooker stews.



Chapter Six

SLOW COOKER LINER

Over the past three years of slow cooking, I've found something intriguing. After extensive testing, I am going to promise you two things:

A) You'll be able to cook two dishes in one slow cooker, and

B) You don't have to clean up afterward. Unheard of? Until now, yes. Read on! All your questions about these promises will be answered.

IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE TO COOK TWO DISHES IN ONE SLOW COOKER?

Yes, it is! The idea is that you separate your two dishes inside the cooker so that the flavors and juices don't co-mingle while they're cooking. When mealtime comes, you serve each dish, one by one, so each person gets a portion of each. It sounds complicated, but it's not.

The trick—and honestly, it's not really a trick so much as a tip—is to use crockpot liners. The liners keep all the ingredients of each dish separated until you're ready to serve.

I'VE NEVER HEARD OF A SLOW COOKER LINER. WHAT IS IT, EXACTLY?

Slow cooker liners first came to market in 2006. The first versions were manufactured by Reynolds Kitchen, makers of the well-known Reynolds

kitchen wrap (<http://amzn.to/1meR090>) line of products. Since then, other brands have become available, including one by PanSaver (<http://amzn.to/1PiYYGv>), which I use.

Slow cooker liners are disposable plastic bags that fit into various sized slow cookers. To use one, you place the liner inside your clean slow cooker according to the manufacturer's instructions. Then you proceed with the slow cooker recipe as normal.

When the dish is finished and mealtime is over, you simply throw the liner away. Your slow cooker stays clean. (There may be a bit of moisture in the bottom of the slow cooker, which you can wipe dry with a paper towel.)

That sounds wasteful.

Well, after you consider the amount of water and soap you use to clean your slow cooker, it doesn't actually seem very wasteful at all to use a liner. Typically, you might use between a half a gallon and a gallon of precious water every time you scrub and rinse your slow cooker. This way you use no water for clean up.

CAN I USE THE LINER BAG MORE THAN ONCE?

Yes, you can use it for another purpose after you've cooked with it. One idea is to use it for food scraps that you want to throw away without filling your kitchen with unpleasant odor. Just put the scraps inside the bag, fold it over and dispose of it.

Here is another way that slow cooker liners can help you to be more eco-friendly: Say you cooked a dish in your slow cooker, and your family didn't finish it all. You can place the leftovers inside the liner, fold it over, and seal it tightly with freezer tape.

Then place the whole thing inside a Ziploc bag specially designated for freezer use. Now when you decide to thaw and reheat your leftovers, you just place the liner back in the slow cooker and re-use the clean Ziploc bag.

YOU WERE SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT COOKING TWO DISHES AT ONCE? THAT'S WHAT I'M INTERESTED IN!

You heard me right. It's definitely possible to make two delicious dishes in one slow cooker, PLUS having the benefit of no clean-up. Just line your slow cooker with a liner according to the instructions. Insert your recipe ingredients for the first dish. Now, place a second liner in a bowl and insert the ingredients for your second dish. Tie that liner with a plastic tie and insert it into the slow cooker.

When the cooking is complete, remove the second liner first and place it in the bowl. Now you have two awesome dishes and no mess. *Voila!*

CROCK-POT

PANSAVER
Multi-Use Cooking Bags/Liners

- Slow Cooker Liners
- Oven Dish & Roaster Liners
- Steamer Bags

One Product Does It All!

For temperatures **400°**

25 Liners & Nylon Ties
23in. x 14in. (574mm x 356mm)

33

BUT DON'T PLASTIC BAGS HAVE BPA? I'VE READ ABOUT HEALTH PROBLEMS WITH THAT.

It's true that a lot of plastic products contain BPA. BPA, short for a chemical called bisphenol A, has been shown to have detrimental health effects on humans under certain circumstances.

Keeping the health concerns of its customers in mind, several companies have committed to making plastics without BPA. Reynolds is one of those companies, as is PanSaver brand, so you can use these brands, as well as some others, without having to worry about BPA.

ARE LINERS REALLY WORTH THE EXTRA COST?

I feel that they are, especially for people who use a slow cooker often. Combine the amount of water saved, the ease of freezing leftovers, and the time saved in clean-up, and these slow cooker liners are an obvious winner in my opinion. And don't forget the joy of making two dishes at once!





Chapter Seven

WHAT YOU CAN MAKE WITH A SLOW COOKER

From breakfast to dessert, your slow cooker is a workhorse that will serve you from dawn to dusk if you let it. There's almost nothing that this decades-old invention can't do to help homemakers everywhere get healthful meals on the table at the right time.

Originally invented just before 1970, the idea for the slow cooker originated with the story of a Lithuanian grandmother who told her grandson, Irving Naxon, about a stew from her native country that took hours to cook in handmade crocks over open fire. Irving invented the slow cooker and then sold his company to Rival Company, who improved on the idea and introduced the first Crock Pot to the market in 1971.

In the years since then, a community of professional and home cooks have experimented with this inspired kitchen appliance, and now we have access to thousands of delicious recipes that we can make in our own modern version of the slow cooker from Lithuania.

BREAKFAST

Imagine waking up in the morning to the smell of freshly cooked ham and eggs. At first you think you might be dreaming, and then you remember using your slow cooker just before bedtime last night.

You sprayed your slow cooker with baking spray and layered slices of bread

on the bottom. Then you used a separate bowl and whisked 3 eggs together with salt and pepper, scallions, paprika and a little shredded cheddar or Parmesan. You added that on top of the bread slices and tossed in some smoked ham and cooked it on low overnight. Ah, now you remember. If only your slow cooker could make coffee, right?

LUNCH

The kids will be home for lunch and you've never seen them turn down Sloppy Joes. Onion, garlic, ground beef and a little vegetable oil should do the trick. Don't forget the tomato sauce. Toss it all in the slow cooker and lay out the burger buns. Mmm, good.

DINNER

Does your inner Italian crave pizza? Are you pretty convinced that there's no way your slow cooker can come through with anything even resembling an Italian pie? Then prepare to be amazed, because in this book, I have two pizza recipes that will have your family breaking out the breadsticks and checkered tablecloth.

You'll want to have some fresh pizza dough on hand before you start, enough to make one pie.

You have several options here. You can

make homemade pizza dough, use a commercial pizza dough brand such as Pillsbury, which you can find in the cold section of the supermarket along with the pie crust dough, or you can buy pre-made pizza dough from the deli section of most major supermarkets.

I like the supermarket dough because it just seems fresher than the prepackaged stuff. If you can't find it, be sure to ask, because your store might keep it in a different section.

You might wonder why you would want to wait for two hours when you can bake a pizza for just 15 minutes in the oven. Well, here are some benefits of slow cooking a pizza:

- If you don't want to heat up your kitchen by running the oven, then this is a good option.
- A slow cooker takes far less energy than an oven.
- Got a class to go or some errands to run? Set your slow cooker and go. The pizza will be ready when you come back. No need to watch it.
- Last but not least, it's SLOW COOKER PIZZA! Isn't that just cool?

DESSERT

For your sweet tooth, how about some brownie cake, carrot cake, or a nice bread pudding? It's all possible in your slow cooker! In this book, I included some bonus dessert recipes! :)

BEVERAGES AND MORE

Hot apple cider is a cinch when you use

your slow cooker, plus you can serve directly from your Crock Pot!

As you can see, every mealtime can be made easy when you have the benefit of a slow cooker.

Now, without further ado, flip to the next page for all of my tried and tested slow cooker recipes! *Bon appétit!*

Part Two

SLOW COOKER RECIPES

Chapter Eight

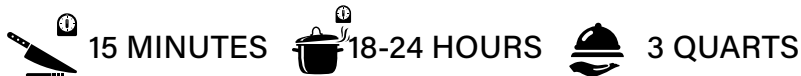
BROTH

Ever since I learned to make broth in a slow cooker, there has been no going back to packaged or canned broth. In this chapter, you'll find my go-to bone broth, chicken broth and vegetable broth recipes that are all gluten-free, hearty, and rich in flavor.

I strongly encourage you to make your own broth and keep it in the fridge or freeze it for later.

In this book, many recipes call for a broth, and the homemade broth is what I used to test these recipes. It does make a difference. If you've never made broth at home before, I highly recommend that you give it a try. Here are the recipes.

Beef Bone Broth



INGREDIENTS

- 3-4 pounds of mixed beef bones (oxtail, knuckles, short rib, etc.)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, chopped
- 3 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400° F.
2. Place the mixed bones on a baking tray in a single layer and place it into the oven. Roast the bones for 30 minutes. Turn bones over and roast another 30 minutes.
3. While the bones are roasting, chop the carrots, onions and celery. You are discarding these later, so a rough chop works great!
4. Place roasted bones, chopped vegetables, bay leaf and apple cider vinegar in a 6-quart crockpot. Cover completely with water.
5. Heat broth on high until it comes to a rapid simmer. Reduce to low heat and simmer for 12-24 hours. Add water as needed to keep all the ingredients covered in water and periodically skim the foam off the top of the pot.
6. After 12-24 hours, the broth should be a dark brown color. Strain the broth through a fine mesh strainer and discard the bones, vegetables and bay leaf.
7. Before using, put in a container and cool to room temperature. Once cooled, chill in the refrigerator for 1-2 hours. Skim off the accumulated fat at the top of the container and broth and you are ready to use. Just reheat and enjoy.

Nutrition information per cup: 116 Fat: 6 g | Saturated fat: 2.2 g | Carbohydrates: 3 g | Sugar: 1 g | Sodium: 85 mg | Fiber: < 1 g | Protein: 12 g



Chicken Broth



5 MINUTES



10-18 HOURS



3 QUARTS

INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds chicken thighs/ wings, bone in and skin on
- 1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 ounce fresh ginger, sliced
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 2 bay leaves
- Water

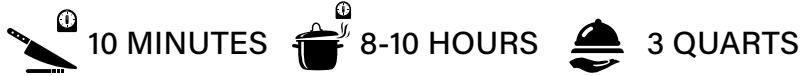
INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse chicken parts thoroughly and place them at the bottom of a 6-quart slow cooker.
2. Add onion, ginger, sea salt, and bay leaves into the slow cooker and pour water over all ingredients to fill the pot.
3. Cover and cook on low for 8-9 hours or on high for 4-5 hours, until the broth is deeply flavored.
4. Let the broth settle for 5 minutes and remove as much fat as possible from the surface using a large spoon.
5. Discard the solids and strain the broth through a fine-mesh strainer into a large container. Enjoy and refrigerate or freeze the leftovers for later.

Nutrition information per cup: Calories: 63 Fat: 4 g | Saturated fat: 1.1 g | Carbohydrates: 3 g | Sugar: 0 g | Sodium: 235 mg | Fiber: < 1 g | Protein: 5 g



Vegetable Broth



10 MINUTES

8-10 HOURS

3 QUARTS

INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 to 3 carrots, chopped
- 3 to 4 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- 8 ounces mushrooms (or mushroom stems)
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme (optional)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 small bunch parsley
- Salt, to taste
- 1 teaspoon whole peppercorns
- Water

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine all ingredients in a 6-quart slow cooker. Pour water over to fill the pot. Cover and cook on low for 8-9 hours or on high for 4-5 hours, until the broth is deeply flavored.
2. Discard the solids and strain the broth through a fine-mesh strainer into a large container. Enjoy and refrigerate or freeze the leftovers for later.

Nutrition information per cup: Calories: 21 Fat: 0.2 g | Saturated fat: 0 g | Carbohydrates: 5 g | Sugar: 2 g | Sodium: 32 mg | Fiber: 1 g | Protein: 1 g

Chapter Nine

BEEF



Shanghai-style Beef Borscht Soup



INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 pound beef stew meat
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 cup carrots, chopped
- 1 large russet potato, diced
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic (about 4 medium garlic cloves)
- 2 cups beef broth
- 1 6-ounce can tomato paste
- 1 14.5-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 3 cups green cabbage, thinly sliced
- Chopped fresh basil for garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make a roux by melting butter with canola oil over medium heat in a skillet. Once the butter is completely melted, decrease the heat to low and add flour; stir constantly until the mixture is blended and smooth.
2. Add onion into the roux; increase the heat to medium. Stir until the onion is well-coated and fragrant; transfer the mixture to the slow cooker.
3. Place all other ingredient except the cabbage in the slow cooker; stir well. Cover and cook on low for 8 hours.
4. Add cabbage, switch slow cooker to high setting. Cook for an additional 30 minutes or until the cabbage is tender.
5. Taste and add more salt or sugar if desired. Dish, garnish with basil, and serve with your favorite bread.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 560 Fat: 21 g | Saturated fat: 7.2 g | Carbohydrates: 49 g | Sugar: 18 g | Sodium: 1060 mg | Fiber: 8 g | Protein: 44 g



Tangy Barbecue Beef Burgers



10 MINUTES



6-8 HOURS



6-8

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (3- to 4-pound) boneless beef roast
- 1/2 medium onion, diced
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/4 cup brown sugar, firmly packed
- 2 teaspoons dry mustard
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1/3 cup cider vinegar
- 1/3 cup Worcestershire sauce
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 6-8 burger buns

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place beef roast in a 4- or 6-quart slow cooker.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine all other ingredients other than the buns; mix well.
3. Pour the sauce mixture over the beef. Cook on low for 6-8 hours.
4. Once done, use two forks to shred the beef. Taste, add more salt if desired.
5. Serve in burger buns with spring mix and tomato slices.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 480 Fat: 12 g | Saturated fat: 4.4 g | Carbohydrates: 32 g | Sugar: 16 g | Sodium: 950 mg | Fiber: 1 g | Protein: 56 g



Galbi Jjim - Korean Beef Short Ribs



INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup beef broth
- 1 cup water
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1/2 cup onion, sliced
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon red wine (or cooking wine)
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 2-3pounds beef short ribs
- 1/2 cup shiitake mushroom, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 5 ounces radish
- 1 cup baby carrots
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 stem green onion, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Season water with soy sauce, onion, garlic, red wine and brown sugar. Mix well and set aside.
2. Place short ribs, mushroom, radish, and carrots in your crockpot.
3. Pour seasoned water over all the ingredients and cook on low for 7-8 hours.
4. Before serving, transfer all solid ingredients from the crock pot to a large pot. Add 1 cup of sauce from your crockpot and cook over high heat on your stove. Meanwhile, add honey and sesame oil. Season with salt and pepper. Stir until the liquid evaporates (about 10 minutes).
5. Sprinkle with chopped green onion and serve.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 570 Fat: 24 g | Saturated fat: 8.4 g | Carbohydrates: 15 g | Sugar: 9 g | Sodium: 1290 mg | Fiber: 2 g | Protein: 69 g



Hearty Beef Stew



INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds beef stew meat
- 1/2 medium onion, sliced
- 2 stalks celery, sliced
- 4 carrots, sliced
- 3 medium potatoes, cubed
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 6 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 1/2 cups beef stock
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 bay leaf
- fresh cilantro for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium bowl, combine flour, salt and ground black pepper.
2. Coat beef with the flour mixture and place in your crockpot with all the vegetables. Add bay leaf.
3. Leave the remaining flour mixture, if any, in the same medium bowl. Add beef stock, garlic, Worcestershire sauce and paprika. Stir well, then pour over the beef and vegetables.
4. Cook on high for 4-5 hours or low for 8-10 hours.
5. Garnish with cilantro leaves before serving.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 410 Fat: 10 g | Saturated fat: 3.7 g | Carbohydrates: 28 g | Sugar: 4 g | Sodium: 680 mg | Fiber: 4 g | Protein: 50 g

Killer Beef Roast



INGREDIENTS

- 1 (1.2-ounce) package brown gravy mix (dry)
- 1 (1-ounce) package ranch dressing (dry)
- 1 (1.3-ounce) package Italian salad dressing mix (dry)
- 1 tablespoon ground black pepper
- 2.5 pounds beef chunk roast
- 10-12 crimini mushrooms or 1 (8-ounce) package baby bella mushrooms
- 1 pound small potatoes (or 2 large potatoes, cubed)
- 1 small onion, sliced
- 2 cups baby carrots
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup water

**Note: If allergic to gluten, look for gluten-free gravy mix, ranch dressing and Italian salad dressing mix. (McCormick has gluten-free brown gravy mix. Some ranch dressing mixes contains gluten, and some don't; please pay attention to the label. Simply Organic Italian salad dressing mix is gluten-free.)*

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium bowl, combine gravy mix, both dressing mixes, and ground black pepper. Rub on each side of the beef roast. Set aside.
2. Place half of the prepared vegetables at the bottom of your slow cooker, followed by the roast, then add the other half of the vegetables. Sprinkle with the rest of the seasoning mixture if you have any left. If using small potatoes, no need to cut. Leave the skin on. (I recommend you wrap the vegetables in foil and place on top of the roast to prevent the vegetables from being disintegrating after long hours of cooking. Please refer to the step-by-step guide on page 29.)
3. Pour water over the ingredients and add bay leaf. Cover and cook on low for 9 hours.
4. When done cooking, dish out the roast and vegetables. Let the sauce sit in the slow cooker for couple minutes. Tilt the slow cooker a little and remove as much fat as possible from the surface of the sauce by using a big spoon. Serve beef roast and vegetables with the sauce.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 700 Fat: 19 g | Saturated fat: 7 g | Carbohydrates: 37 g | Sugar: 5 g | Sodium: 1180 mg | Fiber: 5 g | Protein: 91 g

Beef Barley Soup



INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1/4 cup tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves or 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/2 cup dry red wine
- 1 (28-ounce) can tomato puree
- 2 cups low-sodium beef broth
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1/3 cup soy sauce (or coconut aminos if allergic to gluten)
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 cups frozen vegetable mix
- 2 cups tomato, diced
- 1/2 cup uncooked barley (or gluten-free orzo)
- 1 1/2 pounds chunk roast, trimmed and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- sea salt and ground black pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oil in a non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, tomato paste, thyme, 1/4 teaspoon salt and cook 10-12 minutes until onions are tender and all ingredients are spread out evenly. Stir often.
2. Transfer the onion mixture into a slow cooker. Stir in tomato puree, broths, soy sauce, brown sugar, all vegetables and barley until evenly combined.
3. Season meat with 1/2 teaspoon sea salt and 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper. Toss well and place in the slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 9-11 hours, or on high for 5-7 hours until the meat is tender.
4. Once done, let the beef barley soup sit in the slow cooker for 5 minutes. Use a spoon to remove any fat from the surface. Stir in parsley. Add more salt or pepper to taste if desired. Serve with your favorite bread.

**Note: For a gluten-free version, substitute coconut aminos for the soy sauce. Barley can be replaced with gluten-free orzo. However, orzo cooks much faster than barley, so add the orzo 15 minutes before the end of cooking and switch on high setting. Cover and cook until the orzo is tender.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 710 Fat: 23 g | Saturated fat: 6.1 g | Carbohydrates: 52 g | Sugar: 19 g | Sodium: 1820 mg | Fiber: 11 g | Protein: 69 g



Classic Beef Short Ribs



INGREDIENTS

- 1/3 cup flour (all-purpose or gluten-free)
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 3 pounds bone-in beef short ribs
- 1/4 cup butter
- 8 ounces small button mushrooms
- 2 large bell peppers, chopped
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup beef broth
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup chili sauce
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon chili powder

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put flour, salt and pepper in a large Ziploc bag. Add ribs and shake to coat.
2. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Place ribs in the skillet; increase to medium-high heat; brown each side for 30-45 seconds. Do it in batches if necessary.
3. Transfer the ribs to slow cooker. Add mushrooms and bell peppers.
4. In the same skillet, combine onion, broth, vinegar, sugar, chili sauce, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, minced garlic, chili powder, and the remaining flour from the bag.
5. Bring to a boil; stir well.
6. Pour over ribs. Cover and cook on low for 9 hours.
7. Serve over hash browns, mashed potatoes, or rice.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 990 Fat: 43 g | Saturated fat: 19.1 g | Carbohydrates: 41 g | Sugar: 27 g | Sodium: 1510 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 104 g



Pepper Steak



15 MINUTES



6-8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 1/2 - 2 pounds round steak or sirloin tip steak, cut into 1/2-inch strips
- 1/2 cup beef broth
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can Italian stewed tomatoes, undrained
- 3 tablespoons teriyaki or soy sauce (use Tamari or coconut amino if allergic to gluten)
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar
- 1 small onion, sliced
- 1 large red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 large yellow or green bell pepper, sliced

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine salt, pepper and cornstarch in a large bowl. Mix until the beef is coated well.
2. Place beef in a slow cooker, leaving the remaining cornstarch behind.
3. Dissolve the cornstarch in beef broth in the same bowl and pour over the beef. Add minced garlic, red pepper flakes, tomatoes with their juices, teriyaki or soy sauce and sugar. Combine well, cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours.
4. 30 minutes before the end of cooking, add onion and bell peppers and cook until the vegetables are tender. Serve over rice.

**Note: If you want the sauce to be thicker, simply dissolve 1 tablespoon cornstarch with 1 tablespoon beef broth and add it to the slow cooker. Keep it on low setting and stir until the sauce is thickened.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 460 Fat: 17 g | Saturated fat: 6.2 g | Carbohydrates: 21 g | Sugar: 10 g | Sodium: 1130 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 54 g



Smoked Paprika Beef Goulash



20 MINUTES



8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 medium onions, sliced
- 1/4 cup smoked Spanish paprika
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 1/2 cups beef broth
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 pounds beef chuck eye roast, trimmed and cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 (10-ounce) package frozen sweet peas
- 1/2 cup sour cream

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oil in a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until simmering. Add onion, paprika, salt, tomato paste, garlic and cumin. Cook, stirring often until the onions are softened and lightly browned (about 8-10 minutes).
2. Stir in cornstarch. Mix until the cornstarch is evenly distributed.
3. Stir in beef broth and stir until the mixture is thickened, scraping up any browned bits (about 2-3 minutes).
4. Transfer the mixture into a slow cooker. Add bay leaf. Lightly season beef with salt and pepper and add to the slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 8-10 hours or on high for 5-7 hours.
5. Let the cooking liquid settle for a few minutes and remove as much fat as possible from the surface by using a big spoon. Remove the bay leaf, as well.
6. Reserve 1 cup of the cooking liquid in a small bowl. Add peas and cover the slow cooker for another 5 minutes.
7. Add sour cream into the small bowl. Mix with cooking liquid until well blended.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 920 Fat: 36 g | Saturated fat: 12.7 g | Carbohydrates: 34 g | Sugar: 12 g | Sodium: 1040 mg | Fiber: 9 g | Protein: 114 g

8. Once the peas are tender, stir the sour cream mixture back into the slow cooker. Serve the goulash over egg noodles, rice or potatoes.



Easy Round Steak



5 MINUTES



8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 2-3 pounds round steak
- 1 (1 1/4 ounce) envelope dry onion soup mix
- 2 (10 1/2 ounce) cans cream of mushroom soup
- 8 ounces mushroom, sliced
- 1/4 cup water

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine all ingredients in a slow cooker.
2. Cover and cook on low for 8-10 hours or on high for 5-6 hours.
3. Serve with mashed potatoes and tomatoes.

**Note: For a gluten-free version, Healthy Valley and Pacific Natural Foods sell gluten-free cream of mushroom soup. But if you can't find gluten-free dry onion soup mix and gluten-free cream of mushroom soup in the store, here are the recipes to make your own.*

Gluten-free Dry Onion Soup Mix

Combine 1 1/2 cups dried minced onion, 2/3 cup beef bouillon powder (gluten-free), 2 1/2 tablespoons onion powder, 1/2 teaspoon crushed celery seed, and 1/2 teaspoon sugar. Store in an airtight container. About 5 tablespoons equals a single 1 1/4-ounce package of store-bought dry onion soup mix.

Gluten-free Cream of Mushroom Soup (3 1/2 cups)

In a medium saucepan, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-high heat. Add 1 small minced shallot

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 590 Fat: 26 g | Saturated fat: 9.2 g | Carbohydrates: 12 g | Sugar: 2 g | Sodium: 1320 mg | Fiber: 1 g | Protein: 72 g

and 1 pound of sliced button or baby bella mushrooms, and cook until the shallots are translucent and the mushrooms are fork tender (about 4 minutes).

Transfer the mushrooms and shallots to a small bowl, and set it aside. To the same medium saucepan, add 3 tablespoons unsalted butter and melt over medium heat.

Add 5 tablespoons gluten-free flour blend, 3/4 teaspoon sea salt and 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper, and stir to combine well. The mixture will clump at first, and then smooth.

Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the mixture has just begun to turn a very light brown color.

Add 1 1/2 cups vegetable stock to the mixture very slowly, stirring constantly to break up any lumps.

Add 1 (14-ounce) can evaporated milk, and

continue to stir until the mixture is smooth. Bring the mixture to a simmer, and continue to cook for about 5-7 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Remove the saucepan from the heat and add the mushrooms and shallots. Stir to combine.

Recipe adapted from Food.com²



The Best Weeknight Chili



15 MINUTES



8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Salt
- 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 2 (15.5-ounce) cans dark red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup dark beer
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 2-4 teaspoons minced chipotle pepper in adobo sauce
- 1 1/2 pounds 85 percent lean ground beef
- Ground black pepper
- Shredded cheddar cheese for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onions, garlic, chili powder, tomato paste, cumin, pepper flakes and a dash of salt; cook and stir often, until the onions are softened and lightly browned, about 10 to 12 minutes.
2. Stir in the beer, scraping off any browned bits.
3. Transfer mixture to a slow cooker and stir in beans, diced tomatoes with their juice, soy sauce, oregano, sugar and chipotle until evenly combined.
4. Stir ground beef into the slow cooker, breaking up any larger pieces.
5. Cover and cook on low for 8 to 9 hours, or on high for 5 to 6 hours.
6. Let the chili settle for 5 minutes, then skim as much fat as possible from the surface using a large spoon. Season with ground black pepper and serve with cheese.

**Note: I've tried this chili without dark beer. It's still delicious. If you would like a gluten-free version of this chili, feel free to omit the beer. Alternatively, you could substitute 1/2 cup dark coffee for the beer.*

Soy sauce can be substituted for salt.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 1270 Fat: 22 g | Saturated fat: 5.1 g | Carbohydrates: 163 g | Sugar: 19 g | Sodium: 950 mg | Fiber: 40 g | Protein: 107 g



Beef Barbacoa



5 MINUTES



8 HOURS



8

INGREDIENTS

- 3-4 pounds beef chuck roast
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 3-4 chipotle peppers in adobo
- 1 cup beef broth or bone broth
- 4 cloves garlic
- 1 1/2 tablespoons ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- 3 bay leaves

FOR SERVING:

- Tortillas
- Chopped white onion
- Chopped tomatoes
- Chopped fresh cilantro
- Chopped avocado

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut beef into large cubes and place them in a slow cooker. Add onions.
2. Place chipotle peppers, broth, garlic, cumin, oregano, salt, pepper, ground cloves, and lime juice in a food processor. Pulse until blended. Pour the mixture over the beef. Add bay leaves.
3. Cover and cook on low for 8-9 hours or on high for 6 hours. Shred the beef with two forks. Use tongs to serve the barbacoa in tacos with your desired toppings.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 1420 Fat: 106 g | Saturated fat: 40 g | Carbohydrates: 20 g | Sugar: 6 g | Sodium: 1590 mg | Fiber: 20 g | Protein: 94 g



Chapter Ten

PORK



Hard Cider-Pulled Pork



10 MINUTES



6 HOURS



4-6

INGREDIENTS

- 3-3 ½ pounds pork shoulder/butt roast, trimmed
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced
- ¾ cup ketchup
- 1 cup hard cider (I used ginger apple flavor)
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons sambal oelek
- 1 bay leaf

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place half of the onion in the bottom of your slow cooker, followed by the pork roast. Then top with the other half of the onion. Add the bay leaf.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the rest of the ingredients and mix well. Pour the sauce over the roast.
3. Cook on low for 6-8 hours or until the pork is cooked through and pulls apart easily with a fork.
4. Discard bay leaf. Use two forks to shred the pork. Give the meat a gentle stir in the sauce. Serve.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 1260 Fat: 85 g | Saturated fat: 31.3 g
| Carbohydrates: 26 g | Sugar: 22 g | Sodium: 1770 mg | Fiber: < 1g | Protein: 94 g

Fall-Off-the-Bone Texas-Style Baby Back Ribs



15 MINUTES



8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 4 baby back rib racks
- 4 bay leaves
- 1/4 cup hot pepper sauce
- 1 cup barbecue sauce

FOR A TEXAS-STYLE DRY RUB:

- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Remove membrane from the back of ribs. Combine the Texas-style dry rub ingredients and apply rub to both sides of the ribs.
2. Lay 1 bay leaf on each rib rack and wrap individually with heavy-duty aluminum foil.
3. Place foil-wrapped ribs into a slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 8 hours or on high for 4-5 hours.
4. Remove ribs from the slow cooker, unwrap the foil, and generously apply hot sauce and barbecue sauce. If desired, broil for 5 minutes for a crispy skin.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 120 Fat: 1 g | Saturated fat: 0 g | Carbohydrates: 28 g | Sugar: 19 g | Sodium: 1880 mg | Fiber: 2 g | Protein: <1 g



Mexican Pork Roast



INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds pork roast
- 1 1/2 pounds. Roma tomatoes or plum tomatoes
- 2 medium russet potatoes, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 1 stalk celery, chopped
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- chopped fresh parsley for garnishing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Roast tomatoes for 10 minutes. (If you have a gas stove, you can roast tomatoes over medium-high heat on a griddle.)
2. While the tomatoes are roasting, trim fat from pork roast and cut the meat into desired sized chunks.
3. Mix 1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt and 1 teaspoon ground black pepper. Rub onto each side of the pork chunks. Set aside.
4. Place roasted tomatoes, half onion, paprika and cayenne pepper in a food processor or blender. Add a pinch of salt and 1/4 cup water. Blend until smooth. Taste and add more salt if desired.
5. Heat up a nonstick skillet on your stove. Melt butter and swirl. Use tongs to transfer pork chunks into the skillet; sear each side for 1 minute over medium-high heat.
6. Place half chopped vegetables (including the other half of the onion) on the bottom of a 4-quart slow cooker. Transfer seared pork into the pot. Cover with the other half vegetables and add bay leaf. Pour the smoky chili tomato sauce over all ingredients.
7. Cook on low for 8 to 10 hours. Discard bay leaf. Dish and garnish with parsley. Serve over rice.

Nutrition information per serving:

Calories: 640 Fat: 28 g | Saturated fat: 11.5 g | Carbohydrates: 26 g | Sugar: 6 g | Sodium: 910 mg | Fiber: 5 g | Protein: 68 g



Smothered Pork Chops with Bacon



10 MINUTES



8.20 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 4 bone-in blade-cut pork chops (about 3/4-inch thick)
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 ounces bacon (about 4 slices), cut into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic (about 3 medium cloves)
- 4 teaspoons brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme (or 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves)
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1/4 cup cold water
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse pork chops and pat dry with paper towels. Season with salt and pepper on both sides. Set aside.
2. In a large non-stick skillet, cook bacon over medium-high heat until crisp, about 8 minutes. Transfer bacon to a small bowl lined with paper towel, leaving 2 tablespoons dripping in the skillet. Refrigerate the bacon for later.
3. Add onion, garlic, brown sugar, thyme and 1/4 teaspoon sea salt into the skillet. Stir and cook over medium-high heat until onion is soft.
4. Transfer the onion mixture into the slow cooker. Add broth, Worcestershire sauce, vinegar, and bay leaves; stir.
5. Place pork chops into the slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 8 to 10 hours or on high for 5 to 6 hours.
6. Remove pork chops from the slow cooker. Cover with foil to keep warm.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 470 Fat: 32 g | Saturated fat: 11.4 g | Carbohydrates: 12 g | Sugar: 5 g | Sodium: 850 mg | Fiber: < 1 g | Protein: 30 g

7. Let the sauce sit in the slow cooker for 5 minutes and remove as much fat as possible from the surface by using a spoon.
8. Transfer the sauce into a small saucepan. Bring to a boil. Dissolve cornstarch in cold water and add to the saucepan. Stir constantly until the sauce is thickened. Turn off heat. Stir in bacon and parsley. Add salt and pepper to taste.
9. Serve pork chops with the sauce over mashed potatoes, greens, rice, or egg noodles. Enjoy!

**Note: The secret to successful slow-cooked smothered pork chops is to choose the right cut. The excess fat on an inexpensive blade chop melts away after eight hours. It keeps the chops from drying out in the slow cooker. Rib and center cut are both great for grilling and sautéing, but they are too lean for all-day slow cooking.*



Louise's Pork Ribs



INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds pork ribs
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 1/3 cup soy sauce (substitute Tamari or coconut aminos for a gluten-free version)
- 1/4 cup honey
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mustard
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 3 tablespoons olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse pork ribs and pat dry with paper towels. Place in a gallon-sized Ziploc bag.
2. Combine all ingredients besides the ribs in a medium bowl. Pour onto the ribs. Coat each rib with the marinade. Refrigerate over night.
3. When ready to cook, take the ribs out of the fridge and let them sit for 10-15 minutes, allowing them to reach room temperature. Transfer the ribs into a slow cooker. Scrape off the remaining marinade into the cooker as well. Cook on low for 8-10 hours or on high for 4-5 hours.
4. (Optional) Transfer ribs onto a baking sheet lined with foil. Arrange them in a single layer. Broil for 5-7 minutes for a crispy skin.
5. Serve with tomato wedges and spring mix.

**Note: We learned this recipe from a lovely actress, Louise Nolan, who's known for A Matter of Justice (2011) and Francoeur (2003). Louise invited us to her home for a homemade meal in Valle De Bravo when we were traveling in Mexico. Therefore, we named this recipe after her.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 1130 Fat: 71 | Saturated fat: 23 g | Carbohydrates: 28 g | Sugar: 23 g | Sodium: 1440 mg | Fiber: 2 g | Protein: 94 g



Tacos de Carnitas



5 MINUTES



8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 3 pounds skinless and boneless pork butt or shoulder
- 1 tablespoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 cup freshly squeezed orange juice (about one and a half oranges)


FOR SERVING:

- Salsa
- White onion, finely chopped
- Cilantro, finely chopped
- Lime wedges
- 12 taco-size flour or corn tortillas

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse pork butt and pat dry with paper towels.
2. Combine salt, pepper, oregano, cumin and olive oil in a small bowl. Rub all over the pork.
3. Place the pork in the slow cooker, fat side up; top with onion, jalapeño, and garlic; pour the orange juice all over.
4. Cover and cook on low for 8-10 hours or on high for 5-6 hours.
5. The meat should be fork tender. Transfer the pork to a baking sheet lined with foil. Shred the pork by using two forks.
6. Insert the baking sheet under a preheated broiler and broil for 7-10 minutes or until the top side of the pork is golden-brown and crispy.
7. In the meanwhile, skim off fat from the surface of the juice in the slow cooker by using a big spoon. Discard the fat.
8. When pork is done, serve with warm tortillas, top with finely chopped onion and cilantro, add pork juice, salsa and a squeeze of fresh lime juice. Enjoy!

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 910 Fat: 29 g | Saturated fat: 8.5 g | Carbohydrates: 47 g | Sugar: 9 g | Sodium: 1630 mg | Fiber: 7 g | Protein: 112 g



**Note: I love my carnitas tacos with my favorite green salsa. Here's how to make it: Combine 8 ounces tomatillos, 2 avocados, 1/3 cup white onion, 1/3 cup cilantro, 1-2 serrano peppers, 1 cup water or chicken broth and 1/2 teaspoon salt in a blender. Blend until smooth. This recipe makes 3 1/2 cups green salsa.*

Country-Style Pork and Beans with Sausage



20 MINUTES



9 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound dried Great Northern beans, rinsed, picked over and salt-soaked overnight
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 large onion, minced
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme leaves (or 1 teaspoon dried thyme)
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 1 (14 1/2-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1 pound kielbasa, sliced 1/4 inch thick
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 pounds bone-in country-style pork ribs (Ask the butcher at the store to cut them for you.)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley leaves

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Drain and rinse the beans and transfer them to a slow cooker.
2. Heat oil over medium-high heat. When it's hot, add onion, garlic, tomato paste, thyme and fennel seeds. Cook until the onions are translucent and slightly brown, stirring often, about 6-8 minutes. Stir in wine and scrape up any browned bits.
3. Transfer the mixture into the slow cooker and stir in tomatoes with the juice, kielbasa, chicken broth and bay leaves until evenly combined.
4. Season pork ribs with salt and pepper. Nestle the ribs into the slow cooker and cover. Cook on low for 9-11 hours or on high for 6-7 hours, until both beans and pork are tender.
5. Once done cooking, let the liquid settle for a few minutes. Remove as much fat as possible from the surface by using a big spoon. Remove the bay leaves, stir in parsley, and season with salt and pepper to taste.

**Note: Use gluten-free sausage for a gluten-free version.*

Recipe adapted from The Best Slow & Easy Recipes Book³

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 1120 Fat: 37 g | Saturated fat: 11 g | Carbohydrates: 88 g | Sugar: 8 g | Sodium: 1910 mg | Fiber: 26 g | Protein: 104 g



Sausage and Vegetable Lentil Soup



INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound Italian sausage
- 3 medium carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 1 medium bell pepper, diced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and diced
- 1 (10.8-ounce) package frozen vegetable mix
- 3/4 cup lentils, rinsed
- 5 cups hot water
- 2 large cubes beef bouillon
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 2 cups shredded kale, firmly packed
- sour cream for topping (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Remove sausage skin. In a large skillet, brown sausage over high heat, breaking the meat into small pieces. Cook for about 2-3 minutes.
2. Place prepared vegetables in a slow cooker, except the kale, followed by lentils.
3. In a large bowl, dissolve beef bouillon cubes in hot water. Add basil, chopped cilantro.
4. Pour the soup mixture into the slow cooker, and place sausage on top. Don't stir.
5. Cover and cook on high for 5 - 6 hours or on low for 10 -12 hours, undisturbed.
6. Ten minutes before end of cooking, stir in kale and continue cooking for 10 minutes or until it's wilted.
7. Dish and serve with sour cream.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 650 Fat: 33 g | Saturated fat: 10.5 g | Carbohydrates: 51 g | Sugar: 10 g | Sodium: 1290 mg | Fiber: 18 g | Protein: 36 g



Barbecue Sticky Ribs



INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons paprika
- 1 tablespoon packed light brown sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3 pounds baby back ribs
- 1 (18-ounce) bottle barbecue sauce

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine the paprika, brown sugar, sea salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper in a small bowl.
2. Rinse the baby back ribs and pat the rack dry with paper towels.
3. Rub the dry seasoning mixture evenly over the ribs.
4. Transfer the whole rack to a slow cooker and arrange it standing upright with the meaty side against the interior wall of the slow cooker.
5. Pour the barbecue sauce over the ribs. Cover and cook on low until the meat is tender, 6-8 hours.
6. Using tongs, transfer the ribs to a cutting board, tent with foil, and let it rest for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, let the cooking liquid settle for 5 minutes, then tilt the slow cooker gently and remove as much fat as possible from the surface using a large spoon.
7. Slice the ribs between the bones and toss them with the barbecue sauce. Serve the ribs with mashed potatoes, tomatoes or a salad on the side.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 970 Fat: 42 g | Saturated fat: 17 g | Carbohydrates: 51 g | Sugar: 36 g | Sodium: 2370 mg | Fiber: 2 g | Protein: 90 g



Smoked Sausage Gumbo



INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 (14 1/2-ounce) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 2 stalks of celery, diced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- 1 pound kielbasa, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- chopped parsley

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In large nonstick skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and sauté until fragrant, about 1-2 minutes. Stir in flour and stir for another minute or two.
2. Reduce to medium heat. Pour the chicken broth into the skillet. Add oregano, thyme and chili powder. Gently stir until the mixture is blended. Transfer the mixture to a slow cooker.
3. Add diced tomatoes, bell pepper, celery, carrot and sausage. Stir well.
4. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours or on high for 3-4 hours.
5. Serve the gumbo over rice. Sprinkle with parsley.

**Note: If allergic to gluten, use gluten-free flour to thicken the mixture and choose gluten-free sausage.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 410 Fat: 28 g | Saturated fat: 8.2 g | Carbohydrates: 24 g | Sugar: 7 g | Sodium: 1590 mg | Fiber: 4 g | Protein: 19 g



Meatballs in Marinara



INGREDIENTS

- 2 (28-ounce) cans diced tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 onions, minced
- 1/4 cup tomato paste
- 2 1/2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Salt to taste
- 1/2 cup dry red wine
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 slices white sandwich bread
- 1/3 cup milk
- 3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley leaves, finely chopped
- 2 large eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 1/4 pounds 90% lean ground beef
- 1/4 pound sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves
- 1-2 teaspoons sugar

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Process the tomatoes with their juice in a food processor until smooth, about 15 seconds. Set aside.
2. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions, tomato paste, 2 tablespoons minced garlic, oregano, red pepper flakes and 1/4 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring often, until the onions are softened and lightly browned, about 8-10 minutes.
3. Transfer half the onion mixture to a large bowl and set aside. Stir wine into the skillet with the remaining onion mixture, scraping up any brown bits. Transfer the onion-red wine mixture to a slow cooker and stir in the processed tomatoes and water until evenly combined.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 430 Fat: 20 g | Saturated fat: 6.1 g | Carbohydrates: 24 g | Sugar: 12 g | Sodium: 310 mg | Fiber: 5 g | Protein: 34 g

4. Now, make the meatballs. Add the bread and milk to the bowl with the reserved onion mixture and mash together. Add 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, parsley, eggs, remaining 1/2 tablespoon minced garlic, and 3/4 teaspoon salt to the bowl and mash to combine. Then, add ground beef and sausage; knead with your hands until thoroughly combined.
5. Form the mixture into 20-24 1-inch meatballs. Place the meatballs on a large microwavable plate and microwave on full power until most of the fat is rendered, about 5 minutes.
6. Nestle the meatballs into the slow cooker, discarding the rendered fat. Cover and cook on low for 4 to 5 hours, until the meatballs are tender and the sauce is slightly thickened.
7. Let the cooking liquid settle for 5 minutes, then remove as much fat as possible from the surface using a large spoon. Gently stir in the remaining 1/4 cup Parmesan and basil into the sauce and season with salt and sugar to taste before serving.



Cheesy Potatoes & Kielbasa



15 MINUTES



8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds yellow potatoes, cut into bite-sized chunks
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup chicken broth
- 1/4 cup white wine (optional)
- 1 pound kielbasa, sliced into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 1/2 cups shredded American cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Scrub potatoes clean and cut into bite-sized chunks. Place potatoes into the slow cooker and add garlic, sliced onions and bell peppers. Season with salt, oregano, basil and thyme. Add chicken broth and wine (if not using wine, replace with 1/4 cup additional chicken broth). Stir ingredients to distribute seasonings.
2. Add smoked sausage to top of vegetables. Cover and cook on high for 4 hours or on low for 8 hours.
3. Top with cheese and cover to allow the cheese to melt. Serve and enjoy!

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 600 Fat: 31 g | Saturated fat: 13.5 g | Carbohydrates: 50 g | Sugar: 9 g | Sodium: 2480 mg | Fiber: 7 g | Protein: 28 g



Chapter Eleven

LAMB

Moroccan Lamb Stew



INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons coriander
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 2 pounds lamb stew meat
- 4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup dried apricots
- 2 Roma tomatoes, chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh ginger, minced
- 2 teaspoons lemon peel
- 1 (15 1/2-ounce) can chickpeas, drained
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium bowl, combine cumin, coriander, salt, fennel, cayenne pepper, and cinnamon. Toss lamb stew meat in the seasoning with your hands until meat is evenly coated. Wash hands.
2. In a large sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium-high heat. Brown the lamb stew meat on all sides, turning occasionally. Work in batches if necessary. Transfer the lamb to a 6-quart slow cooker.
3. In the same pan, add 2 tablespoons olive oil. Sauté onion and tomato paste together over medium heat until soft, about 5 minutes. Add white wine, bring to a boil and simmer for 5 minutes, scraping off the brown bits. Transfer the onion mixture to the slow cooker.
4. Add chicken broth, apricots, tomatoes, ginger, and lemon peel in the slow cooker. Give it a gentle stir. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours.
5. 30 minutes before the lamb stew is done, stir in chickpeas. When ready to serve, garnish with cilantro and serve over rice or couscous.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 700 Fat: 26 g | Saturated fat: 5.8 g | Carbohydrates: 56 g | Sugar: 6 g | Sodium: 750 mg | Fiber: 16 g | Protein: 59 g



Braised Lamb with Red Wine Sauce



15 MINUTES



9 HOURS



6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 4- to 5-pound lamb shank
- salt and pepper to taste
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 cup carrots, diced
- 1 cup celery, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves
- 2 cups dry red wine
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch, dissolved in 1/3 cup cold water
- fresh chopped parsley for garnishing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Season lamb with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat and sear the lamb on each side. Place lamb in a slow cooker.
2. In the same skillet, add another tablespoon olive oil. Add onions, carrots, celery, garlic, tomato paste, cumin, thyme, and 1/4 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring often until the onions are softened, about 8-10 minutes.
3. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits, bring to a simmer, and cook until the mixture measures about 3 cups, 10-12 minutes.
4. Pour the mixture over the lamb in the slow cooker. Add chicken broth. Cover and cook on low for 9-10 hours or on high for 5-6 hours.
5. Transfer the lamb to a large serving plate, tent loosely with foil, and let it rest.
6. In the meantime, remove fat from the surface of the sauce with a spoon. Transfer the sauce into a saucepan. Bring to a simmer and stir in dissolved cornstarch until the sauce is thickened.
7. Serve the lamb with hummus and the sauce. Garnish with parsley.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 880 Fat: 35 g | Saturated fat: 10.9 g | Carbohydrates: 12 g | Sugar: 3 g | Sodium: 340 mg | Fiber: 2 g | Protein: 108 g



Chapter Twelve

CHICKEN

Turmeric Whole Chicken with Ginger Cilantro Sauce



INGREDIENTS

- 3 ½ pounds whole chicken (or chicken parts with skin)
- 1 tablespoon turmeric powder
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 cups chopped vegetables of your choice (zucchini, carrot, potato, etc.)

FOR GINGER CILANTRO SAUCE:

- 1 cup fresh cilantro, packed
- 1/3 cup fresh ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
- 5 stems green onion, green part only
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/4 cup olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse chicken, discard giblets and pat dry with paper towels. Place chicken on a plate.
2. Mix turmeric powder with water in a small bowl and stir with a spoon until smooth. Scoop turmeric paste onto the chicken and rub with your hands to coat the entire chicken evenly. Alternatively, this step can be done using the back of the spoon.
3. Combine sea salt, ground ginger and thyme in another small bowl. Rub the seasoning mixture onto the chicken. Loosely wrap with foil and marinate in your fridge for a few hours, preferably overnight.
4. Now prepare the sauce. Place fresh cilantro, fresh ginger and green onion in an electric food chopper or food processor. Process until everything

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 920 Fat: 43 g | Saturated fat: 10.1 g | Carbohydrates: 11 g | Sugar: 2 g | Sodium: 1290 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 116 g



is finely chopped. Transfer all the chopped ingredients to a medium bowl, add sea salt and olive oil and stir well. Cover and refrigerate it.

5. When ready to cook, lay half of sliced onion at the bottom of your crockpot. Place marinated chicken on top of the onion. Place half of the ginger cilantro sauce onto the chicken and use the back of a spoon to spread out the sauce. Return the rest of the sauce to fridge. Then add the other half of sliced onion and preferred chopped vegetables into the crockpot.
6. Cook on low for 8-10 hours or on high for 4-5 hours.
7. Serve with fresh ginger cilantro sauce. Enjoy!



Spice-Rubbed Whole Chicken



10 MINUTES



8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (4-pound) whole chicken
- 2 teaspoons poultry seasoning
- 2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 cup baby carrots
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- fresh cilantro for garnishing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse chicken; remove neck and giblets; pat dry with paper towels.
2. Combine all the spices in a small bowl. Rub onto the chicken with your hands. Don't forget to rub some spices inside the chicken, as well.
3. Loosely cover the chicken and refrigerate it over night.
4. When ready to cook, place half of the sliced onion at the bottom of your crockpot, followed by the marinated chicken. Add carrots, celery, and the rest of the onion.
5. Cover and cook on low for 8-9 hours or on high for 5 hours.
6. When ready to serve, garnish with cilantro.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 890 Fat: 34 g | Saturated fat: 9.3 g | Carbohydrates: 6 g | Sugar: 2 g | Sodium: 1350 mg | Fiber: 2 g | Protein: 132 g



Honey Garlic Chicken with Vegetables



INGREDIENTS

- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken leg quarters
- 1 pound baby red potatoes, halved
- 4 medium carrots, chopped
- 1 (8-ounce) package button mushroom, halved
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

FOR THE SAUCE:

- 1/2 cup reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large bowl, combine soy sauce, honey, ketchup, garlic, basil, oregano, red pepper flakes and pepper.
2. Place chicken thighs, potatoes, carrots and soy sauce mixture into a 6-quart slow cooker. Cover and cook on low heat for 7-8 hours or high for 3-4 hours.
3. (Optional) Preheat oven to broil. Place chicken legs onto a baking sheet lined with foil, skin side up, and broil until crisp, about 3-4 minutes.
4. Serve chicken with vegetables and garnish with chopped fresh parsley.

**Note: Substitute coconut aminos or Tamari for the soy sauce for a gluten-free version.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 220 Fat: 0 g | Saturated fat: 0 g | Carbohydrates: 53 g | Sugar: 31 g | Sodium: 1290 mg | Fiber: 6 g | Protein: 7 g



Creamy Chicken with White Wine and Tarragon



15 MINUTES



4-5 HOURS



6-8

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 pound button mushrooms, halved if small or quartered if large
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- 4 teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 3/4 cups dry white wine
- 1 1/2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 pound carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (split breasts or thighs), skin removed
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup minced fresh tarragon leaves

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms, onions, garlic, thyme and a pinch of salt. Cover and cook, stirring often until the mushrooms have released their liquid, about 8-10 minutes.
2. Uncover skillet and continue to cook for a couple more minutes. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits, and simmer until thickened, about 5 minutes.
3. Transfer the mixture to a slow cooker and stir in broth, carrots, and bay leaves until evenly combined.
4. Season the chicken with salt and pepper and nestle it into the slow cooker. Cover and cook on low for 4-5 hours or until the chicken is tender and thoroughly cooked through.
5. Transfer the chicken and carrots to a serving platter and tent loosely with foil. Remove fat from the cooking liquid with a spoon. Remove bay leaves. Stir in cream and tarragon, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve chicken with the sauce.

**Note: If you want to thicken the sauce, transfer it to a saucepan and simmer. Stir in 2-3 tablespoons cornstarch dissolved in 1/3 cup water. Keep stirring and the sauce will thicken; then add the cream and tarragon.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 610 Fat: 106 g | Saturated fat: 8.4 g | Carbohydrates: 13 g | Sugar: 5 g | Sodium: 260 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 69 g



Stacked Chicken Enchiladas



INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 1/2 cups light cream cheese
- 8 (6-inch) flour or corn tortillas
- 1 (20-ounce) can enchilada sauce
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- Fresh cilantro leaves for garnishing (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large mixing bowl, toss chicken, onion, cumin and cream cheese together. Mix well.
2. Grease the bottom and the sides of a 4- or 6-quart slow cooker with nonstick spray or a little cooking oil. Pour some enchilada sauce on the bottom (about 1/2 cup).
3. Place two tortillas at the bottom of the pot, covering most of the bottom part. Spread 1/3 chicken mixture on top of the tortillas; pour a little enchilada sauce on top of the chicken; sprinkle some cheddar cheese on top of the sauce.
4. Repeat the layers until you run out of the chicken mixture. You should still have some cheese and sauce left.
5. Finish the layers by topping with two tortillas, then pour the remaining enchilada sauce over. Cover and cook on high for 4 hours.
6. When the enchiladas are done, turn off the slow cooker. Uncover, sprinkle the remaining cheese on top and cover again until the cheese melts.
7. Cut into wedges. Garnish with cilantro leaves and serve with pico de gallo and sour cream.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 1130 Fat: 58 g | Saturated fat: 33.5 g
| Carbohydrates: 112 g | Sugar: 3 g | Sodium: 750 mg | Fiber: 40 g | Protein: 69 g



Chicken Ratatouille Stew



INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1 (24- to 28-ounce) jar spaghetti sauce
- 1 medium eggplant, peeled, coarsely chopped
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 2 small zucchini, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon dried basil leaves
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano leaves
- 1 large chicken bouillon cube

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix chicken pieces with poultry seasoning and set aside. Meanwhile, prepare all other ingredients.
2. Combine all ingredients in your slow cooker. Mix well. Cover and cook on low for 4-6 hours or until chicken is cooked through. Serve with bread rolls.

Recipe adapted from Pillsbury: One-Dish Meals Cookbook⁴

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 1070 Fat: 20 g | Saturated fat: 6 g | Carbohydrates: 146 g | Sugar: 10 g | Sodium: 17380 mg | Fiber: 13 g | Protein: 81 g



Chapter Thirteen

PIZZA

Sicilian-style Deep Dish Pizza



INGREDIENTS

- 1 (13.8-ounce) package Pillsbury regular pizza crust
- 15 slices pepperoni
- 1 cup six-cheese blend
- 3/4 cup pizza sauce
- 4-5 pepperoncini pepper, sliced
- 1 stem green onion, sliced
- Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 slow cooker liner

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place 1 slow cooker liner in a 6-quart slow cooker. Brush the bottom and side (2 inches up) with oil. (This will help make the crust crispy. If you are not using a slow cooker liner, make sure you grease the bottom and side of your slow cooker generously.)
2. Open the pizza crust package and roll out the crust on a cutting board. Cut off the corners.
3. Place the crust in the lined and greased slow cooker. Let at least 1 inch of crust climb up the side.
4. Use a fork to poke holes in the crust.
5. Spread pizza sauce on the crust, followed by pepperoni. Sprinkle with cheese and pepperoncini pepper.
6. Cover the inner lid with paper towel to prevent condensation from dripping onto the pizza.
7. Cook on HIGH for 2 hours. Take the pizza out by lifting the liner with both your hands (wear oven mitt). Garnish with green onion and grated Parmesan cheese. Cut it up and enjoy!

Nutrition information per serving:
Calories: 660 Fat: 29 g | Saturated fat: 13.1 g | Carbohydrates: 74 g | Sugar: 12 g | Sodium: 2240 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 27 g



Chicken Florentine Pizza



10 MINUTES



2 HOURS



2-3

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (13.8-ounce) package Pillsbury regular pizza crust
- 3/4 cup spinach artichoke dip
- 1 cup cooked chicken, shredded
- 1 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1/3 cup artichoke hearts, quartered
- Diced tomatoes and baby spinach leaves for garnishing
- 1 slow cooker liner

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place 1 slow cooker liner in a 6-quart slow cooker. Brush the bottom and side (2 inches up) with oil. (This will help make the crust crispy. If you are not using a slow cooker liner, make sure you grease the bottom and side of your slow cooker generously.)
2. Open the pizza crust package and roll out the crust on a cutting board. Cut off the corners.
3. Place the crust in the lined and greased slow cooker. Let at least 1 inch of crust climb up the side.
4. Use a fork to poke holes in the crust.
5. Spread spinach artichoke dip on the crust, followed by chicken, cheese and artichoke hearts.
6. Cover the inner lid with paper towel to prevent condensation from dripping onto the pizza.
7. Cook on HIGH for 2 hours. Take the pizza out by lifting the liner with both your hands (wear oven mitt). Garnish with diced tomatoes and baby spinach leaves. Cut it up and enjoy.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 430 Fat: 7 g | Saturated fat: 2.4 g | Carbohydrates: 64 g | Sugar: 9 g | Sodium: 1040 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 27 g



Margherita Pizza



10 MINUTES



2 HOURS



2-3

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (13.8-ounce) Pillsbury pizza crust
- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 2 fresh mozzarella balls, torn into pieces
- Diced tomatoes and fresh basil leaves for garnishing
- 1 slow cooker liner
- For balsamic glaze:
 - 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
 - 1 teaspoon brown sugar
 - 1 pinch of salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place 1 slow cooker liner in a 6-quart slow cooker. Brush the bottom and side (2 inches up) with oil. (This will help make the crust crispy. If you are not using a slow cooker liner, make sure you grease the bottom and side of your slow cooker generously.)
2. Open the pizza crust package and roll out the crust on a cutting board. Cut off the corners.
3. Place the crust in the lined and greased slow cooker. Let at least 1 inch of crust climb up the side.
4. Use a fork to poke holes in the crust.
5. Combine butter and garlic. Spread on the crust, followed by fresh mozzarella cheese.
6. Cover the inner lid with paper towel to prevent condensation from dripping onto the pizza.
7. Cook on HIGH for 2 hours. In the meantime, make the balsamic glaze by mixing balsamic vinegar, sugar and a pinch of salt in a small saucepan. Heat over medium heat and boil down to half. The glaze will thicken at this point.
8. When the pizza is done, take it out by lifting the liner with both your hands (wear oven mitt). Garnish with diced tomatoes and fresh basil leaves. Drizzle with balsamic glaze and serve.

Nutrition information per serving:

Calories: 460 Fat: 15 g | Saturated fat: 7.9 g | Carbohydrates: 66 g | Sugar: 10 g | Sodium: 1160 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 16 g



Pizza Soup



15 MINUTES



8 HOURS



6-8

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound Italian sausage, casing removed
- 1 (16-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- 4 cups beef broth or bone broth
- 1 pound white mushroom, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 small onion, diced
- 8 ounces pepperoni, thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
- 1 cup mozzarella cheese, freshly grated
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- Avocado slices and/or fried egg for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brown sausage over medium-high heat in a nonstick skillet.
2. Drain the grease from the sausage and place the meat in a slow cooker.
3. Add all the other ingredients (except the cheeses) to the slow cooker.
4. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours.
5. Serve with cheese, avocado slices or even fried eggs.

Recipe adapted from Food.com⁵

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 410 Fat: 30 g | Saturated fat: 10 g | Carbohydrates: 10 g | Sugar: 6 g | Sodium: 1410 mg | Fiber: 3 g | Protein: 24 g



Chapter Fourteen

PASTA & SEAFOOD

Orzo Jambalaya



15 MINUTES



7 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 8 ounces boneless skinless chicken breasts, diced
- 8 ounces Andouille sausage (or any type of smoked sausage), sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, finely diced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 8 ounces white mushroom, sliced
- 4 vine tomatoes, diced
- 4 cloves of garlic, pressed or minced
- 1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, finely chopped
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon Louisiana Hot Sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 12 ounces cooked shrimp, peeled, deveined
- 1 cup uncooked orzo

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine all ingredients except orzo and shrimp in the slow cooker.
2. Cover; cook on low for 7-9 hours or until chicken is cooked through.
3. Stir in orzo. Increase heat to high; cover and cook 15 minutes or until orzo is tender.
4. Stir in shrimp; cover and cook on high for an additional 3-5 minutes or until shrimp is thoroughly heated.

**Note: This Jambalaya freezes very well. It tastes even better when reheated. Enjoy!*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 680 Fat: 24 g | Saturated fat: 7.3 g | Carbohydrates: 57 g | Sugar: 15 g | Sodium: 1650 mg | Fiber: 7 g | Protein: 60 g



Two-Bean Minestrone



5 MINUTES



7.25 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 stalk celery, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup carrots, cut into 1/2-inch slices (or 1 cup baby carrots)
- 2 (14 1/2-ounce) cans chicken broth or vegetable broth (if vegan)
- 1 (19-ounce) can cannelloni beans or white kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can red kidney or black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (14 1/2-ounce) can Italian-seasoned stewed tomatoes, undrained, cut up
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup frozen cut leaf spinach, thawed, squeezed to drain
- 1 cup uncooked rotini

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In the slow cooker, combine all ingredients except the spinach and rotini; mix well.
2. Cover and cook on low for 7 to 10 hours or until vegetables are tender.
3. Stir in thawed spinach and rotini; switch to high setting and cook an additional 15 to 20 minutes until pasta is tender.

**Note: To quickly thaw spinach, place in colander, rinse with warm water until thawed. Squeeze dry with paper towels.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 890 Fat: 4 g | Saturated fat: 0.9 g | Carbohydrates: 158 g | Sugar: 11 g | Sodium: 960 mg | Fiber: 52 g | Protein: 61 g



Seafood Cioppino



15 MINUTES



6-8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 (14-ounce) can diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 1 (8-ounce) bottle clam juice
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 teaspoon brown sugar
- 2 haddock fillets, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 8 ounces uncooked medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1 (10-ounce) can whole baby clams, undrained
- 1 (6-ounce) can crabmeat, drained
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, minced
- lemon wedges for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a slow cooker, combine the first 12 ingredients. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours.
2. Stir in seafood. Cover, switch to high setting, and cook for 10-15 minutes longer, or until the shrimp is pink and the fish begins to flake easily with a fork.
3. Remove bay leaf, stir in parsley. Serve with lemon wedges.

Recipe adapted from Taste of Home⁶

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 360 Fat: 6 g | Saturated fat: 0.8 g | Carbohydrates: 37 g | Sugar: 17 g | Sodium: 1070 mg | Fiber: 5 g | Protein: 38 g



Chapter Fifteen

VEGETARIAN

Root Vegetable Tikka Masala



INGREDIENTS

- 1 large white onion, diced
- 1 pound butternut squash, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1 pound carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 pound turnip roots, peeled and diced
- 1 pound gold potatoes, peeled and diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 (15-ounce) jar tikka masala sauce
- 1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 bunch fresh kale, torn
- 1 (13.66-ounce) can coconut milk

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add first 10 ingredients to a slow cooker and stir to combine. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours or until the vegetables are tender.
2. Remove bay leaf, and stir in kale and coconut milk. Continue cooking for 10 minutes or until the kale is wilted.
3. Serve over naan bread, tortillas or rice.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 610 Fat: 31 g | Saturated fat: 20.6 g | Carbohydrates: 78 g | Sugar: 22 g | Sodium: 750 mg | Fiber: 16 g | Protein: 10 g



Vegetable Quinoa Medley



INGREDIENTS

- 8 ounces uncooked quinoa (about 1 1/2 cups)
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 (10.8-ounce) package mixed vegetables (corn, carrots, peas, green beans)
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 3 cups chicken broth / vegetable broth
- 1/3 cup red onion, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 stem green onion, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh basil, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro, chopped
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 (12-ounce) package frozen broccoli florets

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse quinoa and place it in a slow cooker. Coat quinoa with 1 tablespoon olive oil.
2. Add mixed vegetables, minced garlic, then pour broth over the ingredients. Mix well.
3. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours or on high for 3-4 hours.
4. Chop onion, green onion, basil, and cilantro. Combine them and set in the fridge.
5. Make the dressing by combining 2 tablespoons olive oil, lemon juice, Dijon mustard, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Set aside.
6. Five minutes before the end of cooking, steam frozen broccoli in the microwave according to the package instruction.
7. Drain the steamed broccoli and cut it into smaller pieces.
8. Once the quinoa is cooked, stir in chopped raw vegetables and herbs, broccoli and the dressing. Mix well and serve warm.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 410 Fat: 16 g | Saturated fat: 2.3 g | Carbohydrates: 53 g | Sugar: 4 g | Sodium: 1570 mg | Fiber: 10 g | Protein: 16 g



Taco Quinoa and Black Bean Stuffed Peppers



10 MINUTES



6-8 HOURS



4-6

INGREDIENTS

- 6 large bell peppers, any color
- 1 cup uncooked quinoa
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 (15-ounce) can refried beans
- 1 (8-ounce) bottle taco sauce
- 1 (1 1/4-ounce) package taco seasoning (choose gluten-free product if needed)
- 1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup water
- Avocado, chopped cilantro, and sour cream for topping

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Chop off tops from the bell peppers; discard seeds and membranes.
2. Discard the stems and calyces from the 3 pepper tops, then finely chop them.
3. Place the chopped peppers in a large bowl, add quinoa, black beans, refried beans, taco sauce, taco seasoning and 1 cup cheese. Mix well.
4. Stuff the taco quinoa mixture into the prepared peppers.
5. Pour 1/2 cup water into a slow cooker, place the stuffed peppers in it so that they sit in the water. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours, or on high for 3-4 hours. Turn off the slow cooker.
6. Remove lid. Sprinkle the remaining cheese on top of the peppers. Cover again for a few minutes to let the cheese melt.
7. Top with avocado slices, chopped cilantro and sour cream, plus anything you like. Serve!

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 660 Fat: 21 g | Saturated fat: 8.5 g | Carbohydrates: 90 g | Sugar: 10 g | Sodium: 670 mg | Fiber: 21 g | Protein: 33 g



**Note: A 6-quart slow cooker can hold 6 stuffed peppers all at once. If your slow cooker's capacity is 4 quarts, only 4 peppers can be cooked. However, you can freeze these stuffed peppers after cooking or freeze the filling before cooking. We've tried both methods, and the peppers are still delicious in both ways.*

To freeze before cooking, freeze the filling and thaw thoroughly before stuffing the peppers. We've tried to freeze some already stuffed peppers, thaw, then cook. The result was less ideal.

To freeze after cooking, wrap peppers in foil and then freeze. To warm them up, preheat oven to 375°F, bake for 45 minutes. Unwrap, check the peppers, bake for another 10 minutes if necessary. Microwaving the peppers is not recommended, as the peppers often come out soggy and rubbery.

Recipe partially adapted from Pinch of Yum⁷



Curried Lentil and Spinach Soup



10 MINUTES



6-8 HOURS



4

INGREDIENTS

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon fresh ginger, minced
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 cup green lentils, rinsed
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 3 stalks of celery, diced
- 2 medium carrots, diced
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 1 tablespoon garam masala
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 bay leaf
- 4 cups vegetable broth or chicken broth
- 1 (6-ounce) bag baby spinach
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt for serving

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat olive oil in a medium sauté pan over medium-high heat. Sauté onion, ginger and garlic until translucent, about 1 minute.
2. Add lentils; stir to slightly toast them, about 1 minute. Turn off the heat, but don't remove the pan from the heat. Stir in wine and scrape the goodies from the bottom and the side of the pan.
3. Transfer the onion mixture to a slow cooker and add all remaining ingredients except the spinach, cilantro and yogurt. Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours, or on high for 3-4 hours.
4. 10 minutes before end of cooking, add spinach and let it cook until wilted.
5. Stir in cilantro and serve with a spoonful of plain yogurt.

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 360 Fat: 10 g | Saturated fat: 1.9 g | Carbohydrates: 44 g | Sugar: 7 g | Sodium: 1330 mg | Fiber: 19 g | Protein: 22 g



Vegetarian Quinoa Chili



INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 poblano pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup sweet mini peppers, chopped
- 1 large sweet potato, diced
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 2 habañero peppers, diced (optional)
- 1 (15-ounce) can pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (28-ounce) can fire-roasted diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 1/2 cups chicken broth or water
- 1/2 cup uncooked quinoa
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper (more or less to taste)
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- Salt and pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add all ingredients into a slow cooker. Turn on high and cook for 4 hours or cook on low for 6-8 hours.
2. Serve with shredded cheese, fresh cilantro, or avocado.

Recipe adapted from Simply Quinoa.⁸

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 990 Fat: 6 g | Saturated fat: 1.2 g | Carbohydrates: 184 g | Sugar: 21 g | Sodium: 920 mg | Fiber: 45 g | Protein: 57 g



Chapter Sixteen

SWEETS

Apple Cider



INGREDIENTS

- 9 medium apples, assorted
- 1 orange
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 1 whole nutmeg
- 2 teaspoons whole cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon whole allspice
- 12-16 cups water
- Sweetener to taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash apples and the orange and then roughly cut into quarters. (Don't worry about removing peels, seeds, or stems.) Place in a slow cooker. Add cinnamon sticks, nutmeg, cloves and allspice. Fill it up with water until it's nearly full.
2. Cover and cook on high heat for 3-4 hours, or on low heat for 6-8 hours.
3. About an hour before the cider is done cooking, use a potato-masher to mash the apple and orange to squeeze out the juices. Finish cooking for one more hour.
4. Strain the apple cider juice into a clean pitcher or pot. Stir in your desired amount of sweetener until it is dissolved. Serve hot.

Recipe adapted from Gimme Some Oven.⁹

Nutrition information per cup: Calories: 150 Fat: 0.5 g | Saturated fat: 0 g | Carbohydrates: 38 g | Sugar: 28 g | Sodium: 15 mg | Fiber: 7 g | Protein: 1 g



Chocolate Lava Cake



15 MINUTES



2 HOURS



12

INGREDIENTS

- 8 ounces bittersweet chocolate chips
- 8 ounces unsalted butter
- 6 eggs
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a small saucepan, melt chocolate and butter together over medium heat. Stir gently until the mixture is silky smooth. Turn off the heat.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, sugar and flour until just blended. Gradually whisk the chocolate into the egg mixture until combined. Use a hand-held mixer if available.
3. Pour the cake mixture into the slow cooker. Cover the inner lid with a couple layers of paper towels to prevent condensation from dropping into the cake. Cook on high for 2-2 1/2 hours.
4. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream and raspberries and garnish with mint leaves (optional).

**Note: I would recommend using a slow cooker liner for this recipe for easy cleaning.*

Nutrition information per serving: Calories: 350 Fat: 23 g | Saturated fat: 14.3 g | Carbohydrates: 32 g | Sugar: 27 g | Sodium: 160 mg | Fiber: <1 g | Protein: 5 g



Part Three

THE STORY

By now, you've learned about all the tricks and tips to help you make the best slow cooker recipes. I hope you've also been cooking the recipes in this book and enjoying them.

Now you can either close the book, put it with other cookbooks or you can continue reading. In this final chapter, you'll learn about my stories.

If you are curious about how I started my culinary journey with no clue about cooking, please read on.

In 2013, I am married to a computer geek named Han Chang. I am Chinese, and Han is second-generation Taiwanese-American. Since both of our last names, Chen and Chang, are equally common and boring in China as well as in Taiwan, we decided to proactively simplify the complex paperwork of an international marriage; I kept my maiden name when we got married in San Francisco, CA.

You might have noticed that I have a food blog. Starting a food blog wasn't something I had planned for. If you'd asked me what I wanted to do with my life three and a half years ago, I would probably have said something about real estate, travel, having a family and raising a few kids. A food blog?

That wasn't a part of the plan at all.

Fast forward to today, when I look back, I've realized that my life has completely changed because of it. Here is the story about me, a fresh-off-the-boat Chinese woman trying to build and live a life in the United States. That year, I turned 30.

Now you can either close the book, put it with other cookbooks or you can continue reading. In this final chapter, you'll learn about my stories.

If you are curious about how I started my culinary journey with no clue about cooking, please read on.

Chapter Seventeen

IT ALL STARTED IN SAN FRANCISCO, CA

It dates back to April 15, 2013, the day I moved to the U.S. from my hometown of Shanghai, China with my fiancé (now husband) Han, a Taiwanese-born American whom I met at a Halloween house party in Shanghai through a mutual friend in 2010.

The moment our plane took off, I knew I was leaving my life in Shanghai, including my doting mother, and I would be facing my biggest challenge the moment I landed, which was to start a new life in a new country with a new culture.

THE DARK

One month later, Han and I got married in San Francisco City Hall. Life was sweet and good. But in the back of my mind, I knew it would be better once I established my life in the States with a career, a network, and a small group of close friends.

I eagerly wanted to belong somewhere, to be part of a community. I wanted to feel that I was a contributing member of the society and that I was useful.

The Immigration Department didn't care what I wanted. I had to do exactly what they wanted to be able to stand legally on the US soil. That included what felt like endless waiting with absolutely no idea of whether or not I had done the paperwork right or exactly when I

might receive my identification and work permit.

I started hunting for jobs during the wait. I found that no companies wanted to hire a 30-year-old woman, fresh off the boat, with neither overseas education nor overseas work experience. Why would they? They had plenty of college graduates to choose from for their interns and junior positions, and those graduates spoke native English.

The obstacles that I faced in the first three months in the States left me feeling empty, lost, impatient, and unhappy.

THE BRIGHT

I remembered what my mom said repeatedly before I left China: "I have no doubt that Han will be by your side, but it is still going to be very difficult to start everything over in the States. You have made your choice. You must be prepared and be strong!"

This wise woman who raised me single-handedly was absolutely right.

It has been very difficult.

Han observed.

He knew my strengths and my weaknesses very well. He also knew how well my mom cooks and how much

she and I missed each other. He also saw something I was totally overlooking at the time—I had the greatest luxury in the world, which was TIME!

I wasn't legally allowed to work anyway. Even if I found a job, I would have to wait until I received all the paperwork, not to mention that the job market didn't look so bright to me. Han suggested that I take advantage of all the time I had to create something I enjoy, something meaningful and with the potential to grow, something that nobody can take away from me.

THE QUESTION

"A food blog?" I looked at him as if he were out of his mind when he spilled out these three words. "I don't even know how to cook!"

"You watched your mom cooking all the time, didn't you? I am sure she would be happy to teach you. You like writing and taking pictures. With your mom's help, I think it's worth a try. Plus, you guys get to talk to each other often this way."

I got quiet.

THE ACTION

The day after that conversation with Han, I entered the food blogging world with one important person in mind—my mother. I was determined to make her proud.

It took me five pounds of spinach to get my first post¹⁰ out. I didn't care

how many people would see the post. I showed my mom immediately and told her that my friends loved her spinach when I cooked it for them. She was ecstatic! She couldn't wait to discuss with me what my next post should be.

The joy of sharing something in common with my mother quickly kicked my unhappiness out the door. Even though she is physically on the opposite side of the world from me, it didn't stop her from helping me focus on establishing my new world—Gourmet Persuasion, now renamed DelishPlan¹¹.

Then everything started to change, little by little...

THE HIDDEN POTENTIAL

I know it's hard to believe, but prior to moving to the States, I hardly cooked at all.

In Shanghai, my mother liked having me in the kitchen, but she couldn't stand it if I didn't do things her way, so my help was strictly limited to listening to her lecture on how to make this, how to make that, and setting up the table when she finished cooking. Just like sitting in a classroom in college, more than half the time my mind was somewhere else.

Absolutely nobody had any expectations of me to cook, including myself, until I become a wife and had my own kitchen. I was just getting my bearings in a new country, and the least I could do every day was to cook something edible.

Even that was not easy, because either I had never seen some of the ingredients



before, or I didn't know the English names of the ingredients that I wanted, so asking for help in a grocery store was a nightmare to me.

I ended up taking photos of the labels with the ingredients and Googling the heck out of everything, including how to cook them. As long as Han and I could put stuff in our mouths, chew and swallow it, it was an accomplishment. My bar was that low.

I spent most of my time staring at new ingredients in the grocery stores, reading recipes online, and talking with my mom via Skype.

I realized that the more I cooked, the better stuff tasted, even with the same dish. Slowly, I found the joy of cooking. When you know how to cook, it becomes so much fun! My hidden cooking potential somehow appeared.

It was like a shy little girl who meets someone for the first time and says hi so quietly that only she can hear it. She waves with her hand. After spending a little more time with one person, she starts opening up. I felt like this little girl inside of me finally didn't consider cooking a stranger anymore.

I documented her with imperfect English and amateur food photos on my food blog. It is fascinating how much documenting my small successes everyday boosted my interest in cooking. It was time to take this personal project a little more seriously and pick up some skills to make the blog look somewhat professional.

"I know it's hard to believe, but prior to moving to the States, I hardly cooked at all."

"A food blog?" I looked at him as if he were out of his mind when he spilled out these three words. "I don't even know how to cook!"

THE OPPORTUNITY

When I was in China, I did a lot of backpacking and mountain climbing. After a 14-day trip on the Silk Road in 2009, I realized that I simply couldn't tolerate the photos I'd taken with my point-and-shoot camera. Since I would most likely only visit these beautiful places once in a lifetime, they deserved to be better documented.

In 2010, I spent the majority of my first year's commission as a commercial real estate consultant on a DSLR camera, a Nikon D90. Shortly after that, I went with my friends on a three-week trip to Tibet, where we visited the base camp of Mt. Everest.

One of my friends is an experienced



photographer. I followed him around the entire time, taking photos at the same exact spots that he chose. He taught me a lot on that trip. That's when I started falling in love with photography.

You see, I didn't pick up the D90 for food photography. As a matter of fact, if you ask any food blogger for camera recommendations, Canon is guaranteed to be their choice. Even before I made the purchase, I was told that Nikon is good for capturing scenery, whereas Canon is good for portraits and food. But that wasn't an excuse to buy a new camera for my food blog. I worked with what I already had.

I wasn't very good at food styling and food photography at the beginning, and my knowledge of western cuisine was basically non-existent. Every day I searched for an easy western dish to cook, then practiced styling and photographing it. We've got to eat anyway, might as well make something out of it, I figured. The days passed by quickly. I began to understand how to cook western food and appreciate it.

Over time, I learned how to use my Nikon D90 properly to take better photos of food in particular. I learned how to use light to tell a story. I learned how to present food in a better way. I am still learning, because it's important to feed people's eyes first when they land on my blog. I practice every single day, and the more I do it, the better my photos turn out. The best part is that I thoroughly enjoy doing it.

One month after the food blog's inception, in August 2013, I received an

email from Food.com. They asked me if I would be interested in taking recipe photos for them because they had seen the photos on my blog and liked them.

O.M.G.

I thought it was just a dream.

People say that having a blog opens doors to many opportunities. Becoming an independent contractor was a huge step forward for me. I felt unbelievably lucky. This photography gig was the best thing I could ever have asked for.

Food.com sent me their recipes. I cooked them, took photos of them, and uploaded the photos to their site.

This process went on for the next three years. I cooked 349 recipes from Food.com. This experience taught me two things:

1. It increased my understanding of western cuisine.
2. I learned a great deal about food styling and food photography.

I was publishing one blog post every Tuesday and honing my photography skills and building my writing muscle the rest of the time.



THE OTHER CAREER

By the end of 2013 all our friends in San Francisco thought I should absolutely become a bilingual real estate agent. The city is one of the most expensive cities in the world. I had received my permanent resident card by that time, so I could work legally in the States without sponsorship.

Selling houses? Me?

I had a big question mark in my head. But the most trustworthy people in my life, my husband Han and our best friends who had witnessed our civil wedding ceremony, thought that with my eight-year background in commercial real estate and my language skills, it would be a no-brainer for me to get a California real estate license.

Being a good salesman takes a certain personality, which I knew I didn't have. But it was true that we loved the city and could see ourselves staying in SF long term. It was also true that many Chinese people were buying houses in San Francisco. (They still are.) I could probably pick up the market knowledge quickly, since that's what I did before, and I could potentially make a lot of money and have a successful career in the States.

So I went ahead and obtained a California real estate license. I put the food blog aside as a hobby, and after I managed to get hired by the number one real estate company in San Francisco, I gave the blog almost no attention whatsoever.

My life turned crazily busy, as I was literally running around the entire city by foot or on public transportation. I bet you couldn't find a second realtor in SF who runs her real estate business without having a car. It was brutal, but I was excited about what I was building.

While I was venturing into real estate, Han had started an SEO (Search Engine Optimization) business on the side, helping corporations and business owners to rank higher in Google searches. This business took off, which allowed him to quit his 9-to-5 job at OkCupid and focus on his own business with three partners. Things were going very well for him. He worked from home, whereas I put on my dressy clothes and makeup every morning and stayed out all day.

After a few months, a few thousand dollars' initial investment, and with help from my mentors, I sold a one-bedroom condo in downtown SF. All the hard work finally started paying off, and I began to be able to prospect for my own clients.

As for the food blog, I didn't want to ignore it completely, so I adjusted my blogging schedule from posting once a week to posting once every two weeks.

Little did we know that we would soon consider leaving San Francisco. No one expected it, not with what we had done to build our new lives together.

THE OVERNIGHT CHANGE

The SEO business relies heavily on Google's algorithm, over which no one has control. Han and his business

partners were well aware that the business they'd built together wouldn't last forever.

It was a normal weekday night in October 2014. I distinctly remember that I was writing an email to a buyer when Han turned to me and said, "It happened."

"What happened?" My eyes were locked on my computer screen, and my fingers were moving fast on the keyboard.

Han grabbed my chair and turned it towards him so that he could have my attention. "Google changed the algorithm. We are done."

It didn't really sink in for me at the time. My reaction was simply an "Okay."

"No, no, no, no—I don't think you understand what happened. I don't have income anymore." Han stopped me from turning back to my computer and continued. "We either recreate the entire system based on Google's new algorithm, which is going to take at least four or five months, or we just drop it."

"Are you going to rebuild it?" I asked.

"No! Absolutely not. I am done with SEO. We don't know when Google's going to change the algorithm again. I can't keep doing this without having any control. We are done here." Han sounded very certain. Then he became quiet.

I went back to writing my email. Maybe it was because my mind wasn't quite there when he told me the news. Maybe it was because I'd never really worried about

him in terms of finding a job or working on something else, due to his skillset. Maybe it was a little bit of both. I had a good night's sleep that night. Apparently, Han did not.

The next morning, their business' revenue dropped by 75%. By that night, it was 0.

It was that fast. Our main stream of income, the one that allowed us to live in San Francisco, vanished overnight. That easily translated into one fact: the cost of living in San Francisco (especially housing) was too high for the two of us to afford without a stable income. My earnings from the real estate business were still negative at the time, and the freelance photography job could cover only a quarter of our rent. We had to adjust our life accordingly.

One thing I should mention about my husband is that he somehow always manages to have two or three projects on his plate. A full-time job was never his long-term goal. He has been an entrepreneur for over ten years, focusing on online business. There have been great successes and countless failures in his life. This time, the downside of entrepreneurship hit both of us hard.

The first thing we did after the overnight change was to terminate the lease of our apartment in downtown San Francisco in order to significantly reduce our monthly expenses. Our lifesaving friend, Lyman invited us to stay in his place in South San Francisco until we figured out what we wanted to do.

We had a tough decision to make. There

were two obvious options in front of us—stay or leave San Francisco.

Option #1: Han would go back to a full-time corporate job as a software engineer, which he preferred not to do. We would stay in San Francisco, and I would continue hustling as a real estate agent.

Option #2: We would leave San Francisco to go somewhere less costly to push on with our personal projects. I would quit real estate, which I was reluctant to do, considering how much I had invested in it.

The mutual decision to choose the latter didn't come easily, but Han and I believe that we made a wise decision as a team. Leaving San Francisco temporarily allowed Han to focus on launching his new sustainable and value-adding business in 2015. It allowed me to focus 100% on building an asset that nobody can take away from me, which is the food blog. As for real estate, I can start again in a few years. It doesn't have to be now.

Two months later, on January 13, 2015, we packed up and moved across the country to Jacksonville, Florida, where Han's family is.

Over time, I learned how to use my Nikon D90 properly to take better photos of food in particular. I learned how to use light to tell a story. I learned how to present food in a better way. I am still learning, because it's important to feed people's eyes first when they land on my blog. I practice every single day, and the more I do it, the better my photos turn out. The best part is that I thoroughly enjoy doing it.



Chapter Eighteen

FROM SAN FRANCISCO, CA TO JACKSONVILLE, FL

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to start out and work really hard as a couple in San Francisco. I feel blessed to have friends and families who were willing to open their doors widely for us when we were lost. The people I met while being a realtor are still good friends now. We truly enjoyed and loved the city of San Francisco.

We promised ourselves that it was only temporary. We would move back to the Bay Area eventually when our businesses were more established and stable.

MY FIRST BOOK

Han's parents offered us their empty house in Jacksonville. There was no expiration on the lease.

Needless to say, the lifestyle between San Francisco and Jacksonville is completely different. Han grew up in JAX; he warned me before coming.

I didn't allow myself to compare or complain, or to think too much about how awesome my life had been in San Francisco. Instead, we quickly settled into the house and put our heads down, working on our own projects. Han wanted to launch a new software service. I aimed to write a book.

We were laser-focused in the first three months. There were no distractions, no social life, and no financial pressure anymore. Only business.

In May 2015, my first book, *Seven-Day Super Smoothie Cleanse Action Plan*¹², was live in the Kindle store on Amazon. In July, the paperback was available.

It was a huge accomplishment for me after quitting real estate in San Francisco. My heart was so full, holding my own physical book.

Besides writing every day during that period of time, blogging and cooking for Food.com were part of my daily routine, as well.

Even though I spent the majority of my time in the house, I gradually realized how culturally different Jacksonville is.



THE REAL AMERICAN CULTURE

Han made a smart decision to take me to San Francisco when I moved to the States from Shanghai. There was not much of a culture shock, since both cities are very international and culturally diverse.

If Han had taken me straight to Jacksonville from Shanghai, I would have probably hated America, not because I hold anything against JAX but because of the dramatic lifestyle change.

Having the experiences living in both San Francisco and Jacksonville make me realize that the real American culture is not at all represented by a city like San Francisco. Jacksonville reflects a lot more about typical American life.

The city is flat and spread out. There are very few high-rise buildings. Most of the intersections look similar, which was my excuse whenever I made a wrong turn driving in Jacksonville, and that happened very often.

People are very laid-back and friendly. The southern hospitality is awfully welcoming! But they also seem to take their sweet time on pretty much everything, and most of the time, I don't have the patience for it.

Lastly, the lack of diversity of food there forced me to stay at home and cook, because there are not many choices for me—especially since I don't crave burgers, subs, or pizzas that often.

One day, I wanted to cook an authentic Thai vegetable soup¹³ that I learned

in a Thai cooking school when I was traveling in Chiang Mai. Looking for the ingredients was the hardest thing I have ever done in Jacksonville.

To give credit where credit is due, Publix is an awesome grocery store. It's probably my favorite place in Jacksonville. However, they carry neither lemongrass nor galangal, which are the main ingredients for my Thai soup base. Then, I went to Whole Foods, explaining what galangal looks like. No luck.

At this point, I started wondering whether Asian ingredients are always this hard to find in Jacksonville. I didn't want to give up yet. I Yelped "Asian Markets." There are about four of them. I dialed their numbers one at a time. The people who picked up the phone were clearly non-native English speakers. I thought that was great, because they probably knew exactly what I was looking for.

Nope! Still no luck.

When I reached out to the last Asian market on my list, there wasn't much hope left in my mind. "Hi, I was wondering if you carry lemongrass and galangal in your store. You know, the thing that looks like ginger, but..."

The person on the other end of the phone didn't let me finish explaining.

"We do have lemongrass, but we don't carry fresh galangal. We have frozen ones, though."

I jumped out of my seat, "What? Wait. What? You have fresh lemongrass and

frozen galangal?"

"Yes! That's what I said."

"Thank God, I mean thank you! I am coming right over. See you soon!"

After that galangal-hunting experience, I was convinced that people are not going to make Asian food at home no matter how much they love it if the ingredients are so inaccessible.

I made the soup. I told Han about my experience of trying to find two essential ingredients.

Han confirmed that this is not only in Jacksonville. Probably 80% Americans have no access to Asian ingredients. Han's brother Felix seconded that.

That's when I started pivoting my recipes toward western ones with very accessible ingredient lists so that people throughout the entire United States can cook my recipes if they want to.

It was the right decision. I wouldn't have been able to truly understand the lifestyle in America if I hadn't spent time in a city like Jacksonville.

On the flip side, we got to spend a lot of time with Felix and his girlfriend Stephanie. It was heartwarming knowing that we have a family in Florida that we could always fall back on when we needed to.

However, having climbed a few mountains is not going to change the fact that I am a city girl. I could sleep in a single-person tent in the mountains

seven days in a row without a shower. But there's something about the concrete jungles, condos, convenient stores right next door that I can't completely give up. At least, not now.

Jacksonville wasn't for us in the long term.

If you want to retire and chill at the beach every day, it's great. But if you want to hustle and do something epic, trust me, that's not the place you want to be.

One year in Jacksonville allowed us to put our life back together. At the end, it gave us the vision of we wanted to achieve in the next three to five years or so. We just needed to figure out where. Our first move in 2016 was to pick a place and move out of JAX.

Chapter Nineteen

WHY AUSTIN?

OPTIONS

Han made a spreadsheet with all the potential cities that we considered, with costs of living broken down into housing, food, gas and car maintenance, internet, insurance, entertainment, etc. Obviously, he is a typical engineer who loves systems and spreadsheets.

The requirements for our next destination worked out like this:

1. What Han wants – Tech scene, with consistent growth for past couple of years, and the city will continue to grow in the foreseeable future.
2. What I want – food scene and outdoor scene. When I am full, I'll have places to go burn off the calories, such as easy access to mountains and hiking trails, preferably with breathtaking views. Oh, I also need friends!
3. What we both want - an entrepreneurial community that we can be a part of, since we both spend the majority of our days inside the house. We could really isolate ourselves if we are careless.
4. The bottom line is that both of us should enjoy living in the city.

Our options narrowed down to New York City, San Francisco, Boulder, Oakland, Seattle, and Austin. Other cities we

considered were San Diego and Denver.

Great! When you have options, you have leverage, right?

Well, every coin has two sides. On one hand, we were extremely lucky to be location-independent. On the other hand, having too many options meant it took practically forever to put our feet down.

CITY SCREENING

After what we'd gone through together, including moving from China to the US, a cross-country move along with the belated culture shock, and renting from place to place, Han and I both agreed that it was time for us to be adults and start building some equity. There was one more requirement—affordable housing prices.

The city-screening process went on for months. Han's spreadsheet got more and more complicated; it made my brain hurt when I looked at it. To sum it all up in an easy way, here's how we went through our epic list of potential cities.

We love visiting New York City, but neither of us thought we would enjoy living there, so it didn't even meet our bottom line. Crossed out.

We would have liked to move back to San Francisco, but the money we had wasn't enough for even a parking space. Crossing SF off our list wasn't easy, but we knew it was right at the time. The city I rated the highest, Boulder, was out of the picture for the same reason.

As we were planning to visit Seattle and San Diego to do our due diligence, Han read an article in the New Yorker magazine and canceled our trips.

He said, "The really big one¹⁴ is definitely happening. The really big earthquake is coming, and it's going to destroy the entire west coast!"

Then he sent this article to literally everyone we know, including our NYC friends, who were considering moving to Seattle. (They still moved.)

I understand that you can't plan your life around a natural disaster that may

or may not happen. But let's say that my husband likes to play safe, and I didn't feel the urge to argue over something like this.

So the west coast cities were all crossed out, which left only one city on the list—Austin.

WHY AUSTIN?

The answer seemed obvious based on our city-screening results, but neither of us had been to Austin yet. "What if we don't like it?"

There was only one way to find out.



We got on a plane and flew to Austin in early December. Our first impression? Austin was actually a lot greener than we'd thought, even in the winter. The vibe in the city was great. I especially enjoyed the food scene.

During our five-day visit, we had a chance to grab brunch with seven entrepreneurs from the Dynamic Circle¹⁵, which is an online community for location-independent entrepreneurs all over the world. The interaction addressed all our concerns and confirmed that Austin was the place that we wanted to be. Honestly, at that point, we made an extra effort to like Austin, because there were no other cities left on our list.

On March 23, 2016, we left Jacksonville, FL with two backpacks. The day before, we stuffed our car with everything we could and shipped the car from Jacksonville to Austin. Somehow, the car arrived before we did.

That was a smooth start.

Thankfully, Austin didn't disappoint us. After living in four short-term rental places, we finally purchased our first home in the northern part of the city seven months later.

It is a four-unit, multiple-family home. Life suddenly took another new turn when people started addressing us as landlords.

Besides becoming a homeowner in Texas, I switched my California driver's license to a Texas license and formed DelishPlan LLC in Texas.

Had I imagined I'd have such a deep tie to the State of Texas three years ago?

Absolutely not. Nada!

What's next? Who knows.

Life is full of surprises...

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Chen is a former real estate professional turned healthy recipe blogger at DelishPlan.com.

When Sharon was growing up, she was strongly influenced by her mother's passion for cooking. She realized early on how important cooking and eating at home are to a vibrant family life. It was not until Sharon moved away from her hometown of Shanghai, China to the States with her husband that she realized what cooking really means to her.

It's a way of presenting and sharing the love by turning a wide range of fresh ingredients into a plate of delicious and beautiful looking food to nurture those she cares about. It's a way of giving thanks. That's why Sharon strives to help busy professionals plan and cook everyday meals deliciously and quickly.

Sharon's work has been featured on The Huffington Post, Elite Daily, BuzzFeed, The Kitchn, RedBook Magazine, SheKnows.com, Examiner.com, and numerous others. She strongly believes that a healthy lifestyle starts with eating right and that nothing is better than homemade meals.

